





A SAILOR OF NAPOLEON

James Hamilton

By the Same Author

THE ADVENTURES OF A TRAFALGAR LAD



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IN ACTION WITH THE ENGLISH

A
SAILOR OF NAPOLEON
A TALE OF THE SEA



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A SAILOR OF NAPOLEON



Chapter I

I DON'T know exactly why it should have come to me to be a sailor, and to go fighting the English. It was none of my choosing.

To begin with I had always expected to be a soldier, just as the Cortés had been, for many generations; as, being an old aristocratic family, of many generations; – thirty-three, unless we had overlooked some; – the head of us had generally looked forward to the land service as being the only thing in the way of an ‘occupation’ which we could have deigned to follow. But those times had gone by, even before the revolution had swept our titles into oblivion, with the remainder of our estates.

For, even before we had crossed the border from Spain, and, settling on our estates of the French side of the Pyrenees, we had become much impoverished; and, but for our long line of ancestry, we had become mere

'little gentlemen'; so small that our title was almost allowed to lapse. Nevertheless, I was a Marquis of Spain, and a peer of the crowned head of that country; but I fear that, at that date, even the smaller men of my own family, still resident in Catalonia, might have found it rather a come down to recognize Marcel Cortés in his diminished splendour as a 'citizen' of the Republic.



However, that did not concern me, at that date. I *did* have something at the back of my mind as to the possibility of restoring the fortunes of the Cortés, in times when the strangest changes were taking place daily, and the sons of beer-shop keepers were to be found at the head of armies, becoming marquises, and princes, too, at a later stage; I thought it not impossible that I might have the fortune to find myself at the head of a victorious army, at some future date; bringing back the ancient glories to a great old name.

That was one reason why I wanted the army, instead of the navy, for, at that time, the navy was under a cloud, and, at times, could scarcely be said to exist. There did not seem to be much chance of a career on the salt water.

Apart from that I had no objection to the sea at all. Indeed, I was always on it. I had a boat of my own, a rowing boat, with one lug sail, which I used for expeditions to far distant parts, at times; getting, on one

occasion, as far away as Spain; which meant a voyage right across the gulf of Lyons, not the easiest part of the sea to cross in a small boat, as it was always liable to sudden storms. But as for becoming a real sailor, and a naval man at that, such an idea never entered my head. All the same I was no more than fifteen years of age when I found myself entered on a Mediterranean frigate; and told that it was my duty, henceforth, to kill Englishmen; and whoever else should venture to come against the glorious Republic.

It was an English sailor who brought me to it.

He was a nice young lad, for all he was a barbarian, and an islander, and a John Bull, and a bit of a savage when he lost his temper.

Indeed, he often gave me a thrashing when I ventured to argue with him, and to point out, what should have been obvious enough, that he was not what could be called civilized by his nationality. For England had not even got a religion that could be called one; and that it was well known, in France, that the barbarous islanders had only recently left off the habit of wearing the skins of animals for clothing, or even painting themselves blue; a thing that had not been done in France for thousands of years.

But whenever I tried to reason with him, for I wanted to see if he could not be made more like a Frenchman, for he was a good fellow, at bottom, he only knocked me about; -- 'boxing' he called it. Then I would have to fall down; though he would pick me up, again, and tell



me that he would teach me how to box, so that I needn't fall down whenever a chap just gave me a tap. But I didn't like boxing much, and as it seemed easy enough to stop the fight by falling down, for he would not touch me so long as I was prone, I generally fell rather easily.

But to return to my muttons, as we say. This Englishman, as he called himself, though he was no older than myself, and not even so tall, had become a prisoner of the Republic, having been captured at the Battle of the Nile.

Their capture had been effected by one of the two frigates, which, with two ships of the line, had made their escape, when the battle was nigh over; and I believe Nelson, the great English Admiral was thought to have been killed; which was, no doubt, responsible for the confusion that allowed some of our ships to escape disaster. But the reason of their shipping the Englishmen was that these had had the temerity to believe that a mere boatload of them could capture any of our vessels that they set their fancy on. Accordingly, they had boarded the frigate, half naked as they were; but immediately found themselves in a trap.

For the frigate, being a very fast sailer, had just begun preparations for flight; and the Englishmen had found themselves in the midst of about three hundred and fifty hardy seamen, mostly from Brittany; and these had no mind to find their way to an English prison. Our fellows, then, had easily overborne the invaders, who were captured, much to their surprise and disgust; and, indeed, they cursed so deeply that they proved what truly barbarous people they were.

Well, it was the frigate that took them which brought the news to France of the disaster that had overtaken the great fleet that conveyed the General Buonaparte to the East; and very glad our people were to have some specimens of the real British sailor to add to their collection of prisoners from all the countries of Europe.

My English friend, John, was amongst them. He was what they called a midshipman; and he had been the officer in charge of the sailors who had undertaken to capture our frigate, with disastrous results to themselves.

And very wroth my friend was, when he found himself ignored, as it appeared to him, for his men were taken from him, and sent into the country, to one of our prisons. He had expected to be taken to Paris, and either put into one of the superior prisons, or released on parole. As it was, however, neither thing happened to him, for he looked so young that the great Captain Dumergue, who received the prisoners, had seemed to overlook him altogether at first; and then, finding that he had not been provided for, had sent him to my aunt's, where he sometimes lodged, and where I lived, telling him that there would be another draft shortly, when he might expect to be sent up the country with them, if it was thought worth while. But privately he told me to make a good Frenchman of the lad, as he seemed a likely, good-looking sort of boy, and one who was worth saving from his barbarous comrades. And I did my best.

All the same, I shall never try to turn an Englishman into a Frenchman again.

I liked John, and he liked me, and we had some

fine times together, when we were able to talk to one another properly.

He knew a lot of French, but the way he spoke it was so funny that I found it much easier to learn his tongue, than to try to understand his rendering of my own. I dare say, though, that he found my attempts to pronounce his language as strange as I found his attempts at mine; but I think I got over my own difficulties much quicker than he did, for he soon gave up all attempts to speak French to me; and even used me as an interpreter when he wished to exchange talk with many of our neighbours.

But what I could not understand was his way of speaking of me, and of all Frenchmen, as foreigners. I *did* explain to him, many times that *he* was the foreigner; and that as I was a true-born Frenchman, I could hardly be a foreigner in my own country. But he only looked puzzled, and said that I didn't appear to understand.

Yes! We had some fine times together. I had thought that I had plenty of adventures with my old boat, before John turned up; but after that I had many another, and some wild ones amongst them. For he was a very restless young fellow, and he never seemed to think he was doing himself justice unless he was in some trouble or other.

One day, indeed, we went out in such an amazing storm that I was, well, frightened; – and there is no good in saying that I was not.

I had not wished to go at all, that morning, but somehow or other John had managed to give me the idea that it was because I was a Frenchman, and not

English; and I was forced to conceal my fears in order to let him see that whatever an Englishman dared to do had no terrors for a Frenchman. So I went, and very sorry I was before we were well launched. We did not get far out. There was a commotion ashore, when we were seen to be out on the waters, our friends running wildly about the strand, making signs for us to come back, come back; which it was almost impossible for us to do.

Indeed, we never could have got back if we had not had an unexpected help; for, fortunately, one of our coasting vessels, which had been caught in the same storm, and had found it difficult enough to get through the great waves that threatened us, and was forced to make our small port, passed near enough to us to get a rope out to us, which we were lucky enough to catch, and to hang on to long enough to get us past the worst of the breakers, thinking that every moment we should be under the swirling waters.

I do not know, to this day, whether or not John was frightened, the same as I undoubtedly was, for he kept the same grim expression of countenance, though he was pale; and once ashore he simply said that my boat was good enough for almost anything; and that, could we have got a little farther out, we should have been as safe and snug as needs be. But I think his real idea was that we had tried rather more than we had ought.

Well, we did get back, and once we were home again John, who took all the blame of our adventure on himself, was so cool about it, when my Aunt Selène and my Cousin Manuel made the usual fuss,

saying that they would certainly sell the boat, if we ever tried to use it again, that, after a time they seemed to believe that it was, as he said, just 'a capful of wind,' and not anything to make one anxious at all.

It was but a little while after that that John asked me if I would sell him my boat.

I was surprised at this, and did not know quite what he was after; but I thought to myself that surely the mad young fellow had made up his mind to escape from his captivity by means of it; and I did not see my way to assist this; knowingly, at any rate.

I did not wish to part with my one plaything, either. It, and some small house property, left to me by my father's father, the only person in my family who was in a position to leave me anything, were the only things I possessed that served to remind me that I was anybody at all more than the small circle I lived amongst; and I wished to keep it, if only on that account. However, I was willing to parley with my friend, so I asked him why he wished to buy it.

He was silent at this, but after a moment his face brightened, as though he had just struck the right idea, and he said, —

'Well, you see, Marcel, if the boat is mine, your cousin will not be able to sell it; so we are all right there. Do you see?'

I thought I saw rather more than he chose to tell me, — namely, that he did intend, if it were possible, to escape from France by means of it. But I thought that that would hardly suit me, as there would be something said about that by the authorities if my boat were to be used for any such purpose. Otherwise, I

was quite willing that my friend should get away from France, if he chose to do so, though I should be sorry to part with him. I didn't want to say anything about any such thing to John, though; so I kept the talk to generalities.

'But how do you mean to buy it, John?' I asked. 'You have no money except what the Commandant is good enough to provide; and that is very small.'

This did not bother him at all.

'Oh,' he continued, 'that's all right! I can give you an IOU for the money, and redeem it, with interest to date, when I get exchanged.'

This sounded very businesslike, and grown-up; and if I had wanted to sell my boat, I might have been pleased to have some business dealings, so as to feel myself big about it.

'But suppose you don't get exchanged?' I urged.

'Oh, that's all right! I'm not stopping here for ever, anyway. I shall soon cut the painter, and then I shall be drawing some prize money. I've a lot due to me,' he said, swelling out his chest, which was a pretty big one, for a small-sized fellow.

'Oh!' I said.

We were silent then, for a while, but he soon spoke up again.

'Look here, Marcel,' he said, 'you're not half a bad chap, for a foreigner. And you've no ties here, only an old aunt, who's the most skeered old atom I ever came across; and a cousin who's growing as fat as butter, and is a very bad example for you to copy. Look here, - I'm going to cut my lucky, as we call it, as soon as I'm tired of the outlook here; and if

you like, I'll take you with me. What do you say to that?'

I said 'humph!' which was what he would have said, in the same position.

He then held out the palm of his hand to me, looking very serious about it. I didn't quite know what he meant, but he explained.

'Slap that,' he said, 'and it's a do!'

But I thought I had better not slap that.

He looked disappointed, and even surprised; but I could see that he did not intend to give up trying after only one effort.

'Look here,' he said again; – he usually began his addresses with that enigmatic expression; – 'Look here, Marcel; you're not a bad chap, as I said; and I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll only cut away with me, I'll make an Englishman of you! There!'

I nearly laughed at that. It seemed to me such a funny idea, wanting to be an Englishman after being a French one. However, I caught myself in time.

John took it all very quietly. He just looked at me, for a time, with the same serious expression on his face, as if waiting until he was convinced that I was not to be moved; then he let the talk drift to other things.

He went on afterwards as though he were not really concerned in this apparently idle talk, but I was certain that there was some purpose at the back of it; for, in some things my friend seemed quite as grown up as my Cousin Manuel, who was twenty-five, and, as John said, as fat as butter. However, one had to be with John a good deal in order to see that this English

lad, with his pretty girl's face, had an enterprising spirit in him that led him, quite naturally, to do things that required the nerve and forethought of a grown man. But it was not long before everybody in the port found that it was so.

'Well, and what are we going to do to-day?' he asked me, directly afterwards. And, as usual, without waiting for a reply, he sketched out a little adventure for us both; expecting my consent instantly.

However, this time I thought he was asking a little too much. We had scarcely got over the last bother with my aunt and cousin; and the particular escapade he projected this time was one which seemed too wild even for one who was so used to his pranks as I was. For it was no other than to get into the great Toulon forts, from the sea, in order to see how it was that the English had been defeated there, under the great Napoleon, though, at the time that he was but a little captain of artillery.

John was never tired of talking about that. He seemed to think it so extraordinary that his countrymen should be beaten by the French, that he showed more curiosity about that defeat than about any of the victories which his Islanders had managed to obtain, at times, over the peoples of the Continent.

But on this occasion I was *not* to be moved.

I told him that we should certainly be treated as spies; and even the great Captain Dumergue, our friend, could do nothing to save us from the consequences. We might even be shot.

John pooh-poohed this. He said that people who shot so badly as my countrymen would never be able

to hit us, anyway; and as for imprisonment; – well, why not? He thought it would be a fine ‘lark’ to have such a fuss made over us, – if we were caught, – being questioned, and all that, and guarded by men with muskets, and trailing soldiers about after us, wherever we went. He said it would be such a game, and the townsfolk would all be set laughing at the fuss that the military men made of it.

But it wouldn’t do for me. I knew more about how things went on, in my own country; and I wasn’t having any, as he would have said, if I had proposed anything he didn’t want to join in. So, with that, the matter dropped; which meant a day’s quiet for us two adventurers, for John had been so taken with the idea that he had nothing to put into its place, when that dropped through.



Chapter 2

AFTER all, John and I were only together like that for about five months. Then came changes, and to my sorrow.

It was only about a week or so after the talk about visiting the port of Toulon, where, at that time, there was an amount of business being carried on that threatened to affect us; – that is, my friend and myself.

For some more British prisoners had been brought in; and our good friend, Captain Dumergue (for he was John's friend as well as my own) began to look serious.

Some idiot of an under-officer at the port had recollected the young English officer who had been brought in, some months ago, and he had been saying that it would be convenient if he were to be included in the new batch to be sent into the country. That was John, and it looked as though he would have to go.

As my folks were such friends with Captain Dumergue they naturally heard something about it. And then I heard, and after that I couldn't help John hearing, too; for I had to tell him everything.

John's single comment on this was the word, – 'When?'

But I couldn't tell him that.

'Very well,' he said, and he was quiet for a time.

For about half an hour he kept quiet, with a grim expression on his face, but no other sign that he was concerned with the idea. Then the expression on his face seemed to change for one which it usually bore

when he was about to propose one of his little adventures. And the comment he made on the whole business appeared to fit the humour; for he concluded with – ‘What a lark!’ and this was all he found to say at the time.

Next afternoon, however, he returned to the subject.

‘Do you think I shall be sent to Paris, Marcel?’ he asked.

John seemed to think that all captured British officers were sent to Paris, in order to be shown off to the big people there. I couldn’t tell him where he would be sent to, though, but I did not think he would have to go any farther than a big camp of prisoners we had a few leagues from Toulon; though that was about as bad for me as if he were to be sent right to the other end of the country.

He didn’t seem to like this idea, and showed a disposition to ‘box’ me for venturing on it; so I altered my mind, in a hurry, and said I thought it might be Paris, after all.

‘Humph!’ he said.

Well, for the next few days I had about the quietest time I had ever experienced in John’s company.

He had something on his mind, as I could well see, though he would tell me nothing of it.

We roamed about the town, and the neighbourhood, doing nothing but talk to the neighbours, who all thought well of my friend, and were sorry that there seemed a chance of losing him. He seemed to have a great liking for this subject, however, and he encouraged our friends to tell us anything they could about what was likely to become of him, where he might be

sent, and so forth; though we could get very little that seemed definite. About this time, too, John borrowed some money of me; which I was very glad to let him have, though it was little I was allowed to handle in those days. He did not say what he wanted money for, merely explaining, with a wink, that there was going to be another adventure soon.

But the only adventure he proposed was a long walk into the country.

This was something new, as we usually kept to the sea, but this time he wanted to have a look at the camp of prisoners that he had been informed by some of our friends was the one where he might have to be interred; and as I thought it not improbable that this was so, I wanted to see it for myself.

We found the place, with some trouble, and not a little fatigue for we were neither of us accustomed to long country walks. But we were not at all satisfied with it, when we got there.

Of course, we were not allowed inside, but from the hills that surrounded the place, we had a good view of the inside of it; and we heard, too, from the villagers about, that it was too overcrowded, and very unhealthy; though there was talk of still more to come there.

There seemed to be an immense number of prisoners inside a large stockade; but the number of huts and tents, though large, did not seem to us to afford much accommodation for them.

I noticed John took a great deal of pains to figure out what sort of room the prisoners would be likely to have, but the results of his calculations seemed to be the reverse of promising. Anyway, he said 'humph,' when

he had concluded his survey; and that meant a lot from him.

'A good many of those fellows must have to sleep out of a night,' he said. 'How's that? Can't you find room for them in this country?'

'We take so many prisoners, you see, John!' I said, not unwilling to brag a little of our military prowess.

'Humph!' he said again. 'I don't know how you do it. You can't catch Englishmen.'

'They don't come over the water to fight us,' I replied. 'They stick to their old tubs, or we should have as many of them as of Austrians, and Russians, and Germans, and Italians; and all the rest of them.'

'You would *not*!' he said emphatically. 'Why, it took a whole ship load of you to capture a little chap like me, and a dozen naked tars. There ain't an Englishman amongst that lot. -'

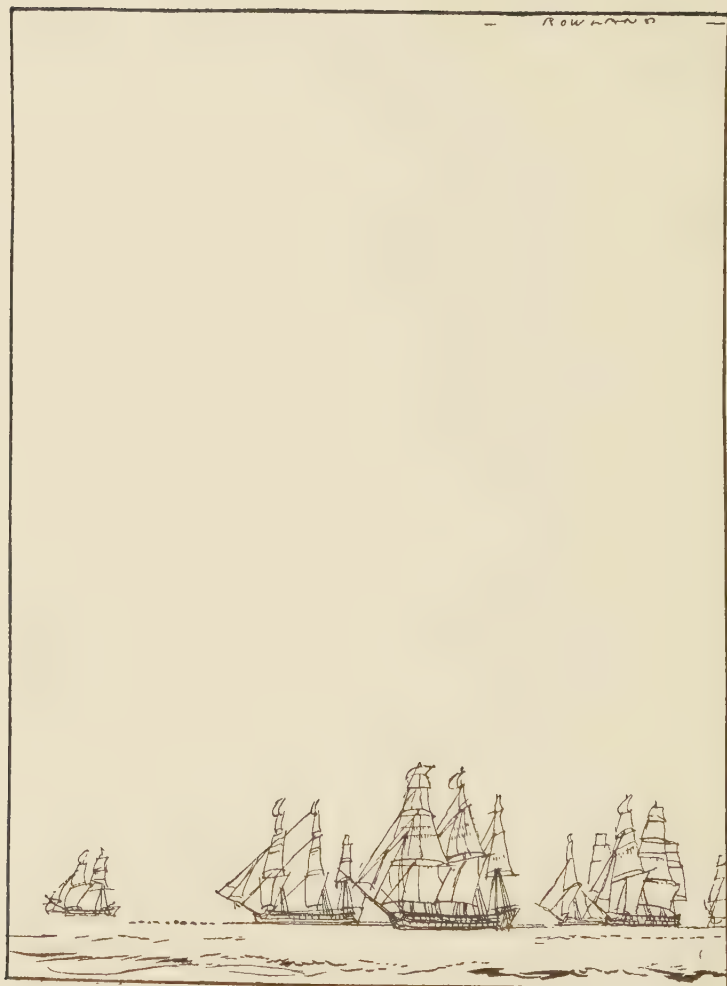
* 'Isn't there?' I inquired, looking about at the various groups of prisoners dotted about on the hill-side opposite. 'How can you tell they are not Englishmen, at that distance, John?'

'They don't shape like it,' he replied. 'Englishmen wouldn't lump themselves together like that. There might be small groups of them, in places, but the majority would go on their own, unless there was a scrap. They don't like too much talky-talky. They want something to do.'

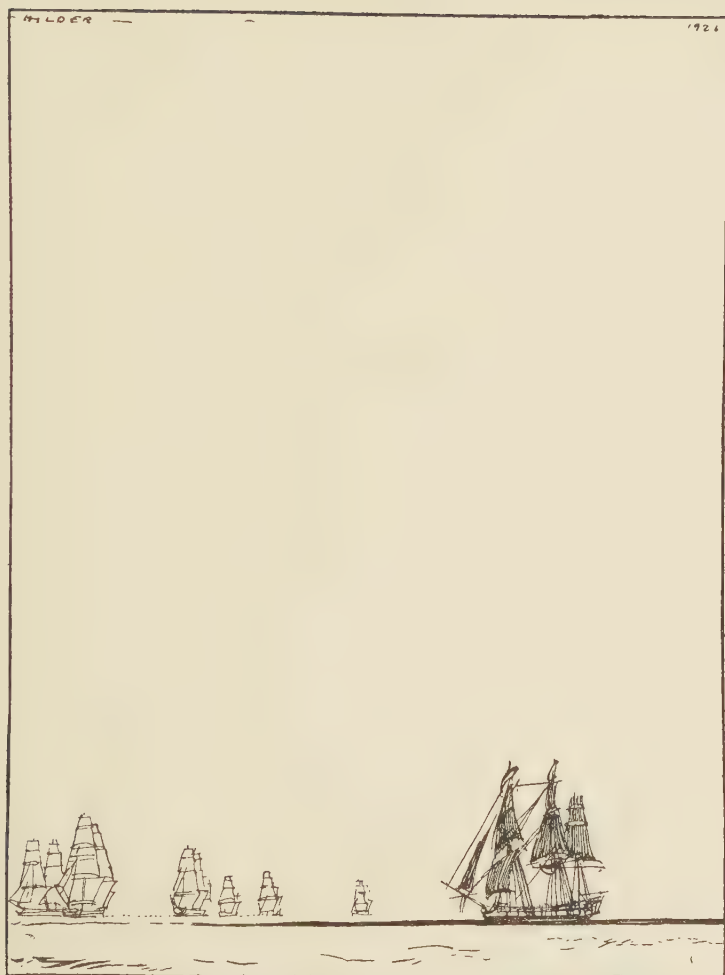
'Like you,' I suggested.

'Just so!' he replied, quite complacently. Then - 'No, Marcel, that place won't do. It's altogether too quiet.'

I said I hoped he wouldn't be sent there, and he



THEIR NELSON WAS PERPETUALLY



CRUISING OFF THE COAST

winked his eye, and said he didn't think he would be. I was sure that he had some plan on his mind to get away, altogether.

Well, we went home again, as well as we could, for the double journey was a terrible trial, and even my sturdy John felt it. And after that we kept quiet for a day or two. No more adventures, or even talk of any.

But there was something brewing, I knew, for John borrowed some more money of me, promising to pay me back again, very soon.

'Prize money?' I asked him.

'Prize money,' he answered, in complete confidence.

I had to be satisfied with that, but I knew he would pay me some time, though I could see no prospect of his being in a position to do so for a long way ahead. The wars seemed likely to last for ever. There were so many new quarrels springing up amongst the different nations; and just how John meant to get away to his own country, which, of all others, seemed to be the one we should be least likely ever to be at peace with again, I could not tell.

If my friend had any idea that his fellow countrymen were likely to attack Toulon, as they had unsuccessfully attempted, several years before, I felt sure that he was mistaken. There was no big party amongst our own people, at that time, for them to help fight the Revolution, as there had been formerly; – not in the south, at all events; and even with the help of our internal disorders they had been unsuccessful. And how else he expected to get away from us, I could not imagine.

Not that we did not have many views of the ships

of his country, for their Nelson was perpetually cruising off the coast, trying to entice our forces out of port, though with no success. But, many a time when John and I were together, on the seashore, we saw his own flag flaunting it in French waters; and he chafed his teeth, and grumbled mightily that no boat was allowed out of harbour, for fear of capture by the English.

At last, however, things seemed to be coming to a crisis.

Even Captain Dumergue, my friend, and John's friend, seemed to be getting angry at the mere mention of the name of Englishman. 'Bottled up,' he said we were, on account of those cursed English. Something would have to be done. For the time was approaching when good Frenchmen began to see that it was necessary, in the interests of the country, for our great little general, Napoleon Buonaparte, to be back amongst us. The Directory, our government of the time, was plunging into an incomprehensible mess, through its own incompetence; and a change of government was overdue. And the one man who was able to effect this, possibly without the turmoil that had accompanied these changes hitherto, was the little man in Egypt; and between us and him were those terrible ships of the English, with their victorious leader, Nelson, in command. No wonder everybody was bothered. It seemed that we couldn't even manage our own internal affairs without the consent of the barbarous Islanders.

Well, I was very anxious, for John's sake, as well as my country. The captain, I knew, in spite of his

gruffness, was doing his best to keep John out of trouble; but I knew that there would very likely be others working against him, and against the captain, too, for that matter; for in those troublous times, everybody was out to show his righteous zeal, in some way or other, by making it hot for some superior, so that he might, perchance, step into his shoes. And I feared that even Captain Dumergue would be unable to help us much longer.

Still John kept his own counsel.

I was sure that it was always in his mind to get away soon; but though I hinted, many times, that I should like to be favoured with his confidence, I could get nothing out of him.

I have thought since that he kept his business dark with the single thought of not letting me in for anything when the time came for him to 'cut his lucky,' as he expressed it. But I was curious, as well as anxious, and what boy would not have been, in my situation.

At last, however, I fancied that I saw signs of some imminent move on my friend's part.

Our house being but small, we slept together, in the same bed; and one night, some time after we had retired, and I had been asleep for a while, I awoke, for some reason, though it was but rarely I did so before it was (all too soon) time to get up again. Anyway, on this night I awoke whilst it was still dark, and found John sitting up in bed, looking down at me.

'Hello!' I said, using his English as natural as life, by this time, 'it's never time to get up again so soon. Is it?'

'Of course not!' he answered, laughing. 'Why,

Madam and your cousin are only just going to bed. Don't you hear them?'

I listened, hearing the heavy footfall of my Cousin Manuel, and the much lighter ones of Aunt Selène, climbing the stairs. They passed our room door, my aunt just looking in, as she always did, to see that we were safe for the night, and not roaming about somewhere, engaged in an adventure; which she was always apprehensive of now that John was living with us. But seeing that we were snug under the clothes (for John had slipped down into bed again, and was pretending to be asleep), she went off to her own room.

'That's better!' I said, when the coast was clear. 'I really thought it must be time to get up. What are you sitting up thinking about John? Another adventure?'

'Yes!' he said quietly.

'All right!' I agreed. 'But not another walk like last week. I'm tired yet.'

He appeared to consider it, and then said that it would have to be a sea journey next time; that is, if we could get the boat out. I didn't mind that. One could rest in the boat. I turned round to lie down again.

My friend, however, did not seem inclined to follow my example. After a while he shook me, as if to see if I were awake.

'Well, what is it?' I asked him, anxious to get to sleep again.

'Nothing in particular,' he replied; then, after a moment, - 'You're not half a bad chap, Marcel.'

'For a foreigner!' I answered him.

'Of course!' he replied, quite seriously. And that was the last talk I had with him, for many a long day.

I had begun to wonder, now, what John had in his mind; but, of course, I did not ask him. However, I did not feel inclined to go to sleep again, just then. I thought that my friend was watching; – me, perhaps, amongst other things or persons. And the idea excited my brain, and I began to watch.

I had turned my back on John, but I was aware that he was still sitting up, with his back leaning against the head of the bed, his hands behind his own head. It did not look as though he meant to go to sleep at all. There was something up, I was sure.

Once or twice, too, he touched me gently, as if to see if I were awake or not. But I lay like a log. I was curious to know what was on. And so we lay, for above an hour; at the end of which I was still broad awake, though I took care not to move a muscle.

Then I bethought me that perhaps I was not breathing like a sleeping person; and perhaps my friend was suspicious of it. So, with a great deal of care, I began to breathe more heavily; with the result that I was almost asleep before I could recollect myself. However, I roused myself in time, before I had gone completely off; but I still kept up my heavy breathing, and he appeared to become satisfied.

He touched me again, after a while, then, after another short period of waiting he appeared to have made up his mind about me.

He leaned over me, and murmuring ‘Not a bad chap, for a foreigner, Marcel,’ which seemed to be his ‘good-bye,’ he slipped out of bed, and began to dress as quietly as he could.

I remained quiet. I was sure now that he meant to escape from his thralldom, this night, though how he expected to accomplish it I did not know. However, he had my very good will, and though I should have dearly loved to bid him 'good-bye,' I knew that my cue was to know nothing whatever about it.

In a few minutes he appeared to be ready; and, leaning over me, for a few seconds, watching my face in the moonlight, he just laid his hand on the bed, and turned, reluctantly, to the door.

And was gone. —

I heard no more of him.

He must have been wonderfully quiet about getting out of the house, for a big dog we had in the yard was a very demon if he heard footsteps in the night. But as I heard nothing of him it came into my head what friends my dear John had made of him, for some time past. He must have thought of the need beforehand. And so, after a time, and, as I must own, a few tears, for it seemed to me that I might have seen the last of my friend for good and all, I went to sleep, and woke no more till morning.

Then, of course, there was trouble.

John was not missed till we sat down to our first meal of the day, which took place about eight o'clock.

He was often enough about the town, waiting till I was ready to rouse up, and accompany him somewhere. But I had to attend to some lessons first, and then *déjeuner*; after which I was at liberty to accompany him to any place which was not out of bounds for us; — though it was rarely enough that we concerned

ourselves about any such restrictions. So that this morning it was thought he had gone off somewhere, as usual; but when *déjeuner* came round, and he was not at hand to indulge that magnificent appetite of his there was an inquiry.

For my part I attended to my business with all dispatch, for I foresaw that I might be sent off to the Commandant's, with the news that the young English officer was not to be found; and, as I was, to a certain extent, forewarned that it was likely to happen, I took care to fill myself well with the good things that were likely to be wanting, for many hours. However, I had not to go, after all, for, after waiting most of the morning, and getting more nervous each moment, my aunt and cousin took it into their heads that the matter was so serious that it behoved them to go themselves, to give the information. So off they went, when the next meal had brought them no information as to the whereabouts of our prisoner-friend; leaving me with strict injunctions not to move off the doorstep; for fear, I suppose, that I might follow the example of John, and disappear.

Well, I tried to obey orders, but soon found it was impossible. I was so aching to discover, by some means or other, what had become of my friend, that I determined to use the hours that must intervene before my relatives could return to discover what had happened. So, with that idea in my head, I slipped down to the quay to see if he had made off with my boat.

To my surprise, however, I found my small vessel still moored to her usual post, and looking as though she had not been touched.

I found, too, that nobody at the waterside had the slightest information to give me of the whereabouts of John.

Being by the waterside, however, I could not forbear pushing out of the harbour, for a little row. I did not mean to go far, being content to moor in mid-stream; and there, lying on my back, wondering whatever could have become of my friend, and wondering, also, with great sorrow, whether or not I should ever see him, my one boyhood's friend, again, I got what I thought was news of him. For, looking up under the stern-seat, I caught sight of something white; a small piece of paper, nailed to the bottom of the seat; and, turning down the edge of it, I saw just a couple of words written on it, in a large, sprawling hand that I knew well enough to be John's. And I quickly made up my mind that it was a message from him.

I took care not to dislodge this precious message, though I did so long to read what it had to say. But I well knew that it was best for me not to know anything at all about the matter until the inevitable inquiry was over; and I could not well know less than I did, at that moment. So I left it where it was, taking care that no one else should have any more chance of discovering it except by the same chance that I had had; trusting that I might be in a position to get the message when the affair was blown over.

Well, that was enough for me, for the time being. I got to the shore again, and tying my craft to its accustomed spot, I went soberly home, where my relatives found me awaiting them, to receive the mes-

sage that I was to go to the Commandant's, at once, to give an account of myself.

About which, my Cousin Manuel, who was too fat to have much sense in his head, as I always thought, first gave me a description of the horrors that awaited me, at the Commandant's; and then warned me not to be nervous, so as to make matters worse. Then giving me a push into the road, he left me, without further ado, to make my own way to the inquisition; there to explain what had become of my English friend; or to be prepared to suffer the consequences.





Chapter 3

MY interview with Captain Dumergue, in his capacity of Commandant at Toulon, was not, after all, so very terrible.

He was very grave and serious, of course; telling me that I stood in a very doubtful position, as a good Frenchman, in becoming suspected of not being so good a Frenchman as I ought to be. For it had been very wrong of me to be so loose in my conduct as to let the young English officer have the free use of my boat, so that he was able to make off with it, without incurring the suspicion of any of the people of the waterside. It might now be difficult to get him back.

But I was in a position to contradict this, assuring the

Commandant that I knew nothing at all of John's plans to get away; but that I was sure that he had not managed to do so with the assistance of my boat, as it was still in its usual place; for I had been in it only a few hours ago.

This, however, instead of seeming to mollify the captain, had rather the reverse effect.

He had thought that if his idea was correct it would enable him to recover the runaway, as with a small craft like mine John would scarcely have been able to get far without being recaptured. But now he was rather at a loss, and would have to form some more correct theory of the means of his departure.

He told me, rather crossly, that I should not be allowed to use the boat again, myself, in the future; which seemed to me rather a stupid idea, there being no blame apparently to be attached to it. However, I have often found men like that. If any pet idea of theirs goes wrong, they immediately follow it up with some other idea quite as absurd, in order, I suppose, to prove that the first idea was quite sound, and ought to have proved correct, even if it didn't. I was as vexed as he, too, for the reason that it might make it difficult for me to get hold of that message that John had left in the boat; though I said to myself that it remained to be proved whether or not I should ever use the boat again.

Having been thus summarily sentenced, I was then put through a vigorous examination as to my knowledge of John's movements. But here the most menacing attitude could extract nothing from me, as I was certainly innocent of any knowledge of the sort; and in the end, I was directed to go home again, with a somewhat vague

impression that I was yet to be convicted, and must expect to be punished severely, if the missing lad were not quickly found. This would not have discomposed me much, but I found, at the same time, that Captain Dumergue, whom I could depend upon to stand my friend to the fullest possible extent, was about to be replaced in his post; he having achieved his step upwards; being appointed to a command in the line in the Italian army. About the next Commandant there was nothing to expect except the usual rigorous treatment meted out to military offenders.

In spite of that, I most fervently hoped that my friend might get clear off; and I went home, bothering little about myself, and merely wondering by what means my friend had got so clearly off as he seemed to have done.

Arrived at home, I found that my aunt had been so overcome by the terrors of her own position, that she had taken to her bed, and threatened to be ill. Manuel, too, seemed to have been thoroughly scared, which gave me the cue to brag a little about my own visit to the captain, in his capacity of supreme military authority of the port.

However the business was not to end so simply as all that. There was a public hue-and-cry raised, and all the place was searched, and my boat thoroughly inspected, to make sure that she was really there, I suppose, and was not an optical illusion. But that all-desired message was not found, I was very sure, or I should have been called upon immediately to account for it, though I should have been, ^{or} apparently, the last to be apprised of its existence.

However it was not found, nor was my friend John;

and I was puzzled in the extreme to form any opinion as to what had become of him.

I thought, surely, that my friend must have gone off by the water, as I was sure that that was always in his own thoughts. But though all the vessels, large and small, in the harbour, had been overhauled, and accounted for, not one was missing. I came to the conclusion then, that he must have gone by land, somewhere, though this made the puzzle greater still. In fact, nothing could account for it until the return to the harbour of a small, fast-sailing private yacht, the possession of a gentleman of the neighbourhood; which, being moored one night, at its usual spot, had by next morning disappeared again, without its owner's knowledge and consent.

This made our authorities suddenly furious. The escaped prisoner must have been, all the time, snugly hidden in our very midst, whilst he was being searched for at a distance. And he had, apparently, bided his time until the return of this especial boat; which, commonly spoken of as the fastest small vessel in the Mediterranean, was one which, I knew, he had often cast his eyes on as a desirable one to come into his possession for the particular purpose of making good his *congé*.

This caused an even greater uproar, for there was every reason now to think that John would be able to get clear away; for the tale of the yacht's powers of sailing grew mightily; and it soon appeared that the young fellow might as well be given up, without more ado.

The authorities, too, were very much vexed to find

that he had been amongst us all the time they had been searching for him; and there was a great fuss made over it.

I now had a much sharper interview with the new Commandant than I had had with his predecessor. Captain Dumergue, now Colonel, was present, though as he had already given over his charge, he was no longer chief. However he sat there, preserving a stony silence which I thought rather hard on me, his friend, though I afterwards came to the conclusion that it was the best thing, and probably the only one he could have done for me; as to show me any signs of special favour, would have probably made the new Commandant resolve to take it out of me once his back was turned.

Well, I was then put through the most rigorous examination I have ever suffered, before or since; but sticking to it that I had known nothing whatever of my friend's plans (which, of course, was strictly true, though I had well known that he meant to escape as soon as ever he could), I managed to pull through. I was not, however, to escape all punishment, for, as I said, earlier on, it was through my friend John that I was condemned to follow the sea, instead of becoming, as my father, and all my race, a soldier; – and that was the only grievance I ever had against my friend.

At that time, however, there was a shortage of sailors in the French service. Nobody who could avoid it ever thought of volunteering for the sea, except those fishermen of Normandy and Brittany, who had been used to it from time immemorial. But sailors had to be got from somewhere; and as we lost so many through

the English attacks, it was a common thing for anyone who had committed any but the worst of crimes to be offered the choice of a sea life as an alternative to a spell of imprisonment.

Well, such was the choice offered me, in rather roundabout terms, I must admit; but it was there, all the same; and though I might possibly have avoided it, it seemed to me the better thing to cut out all possible trouble with the authorities, and accept, for the time being, at any rate, an appointment as a naval officer, instead of going to Brienne (where my hero, Napoleon, had received his military education), and afterwards to the army, to compete with the inn-keepers' sons, and others of the same class, who were showing the possibilities that existed for them to aspire to the highest honours in the State.

'Very well,' the Commandant had concluded pompously, after his examination of me had revealed exactly nothing, 'what you have been guilty of would have made it very hard for you, had you not been brought up with the object of serving your country. As it is I shall have to punish you; and the lightest punishment I can think of is to require you to enlist for the navy. So if you consent to that, I shall be able to avoid bringing you to the notice of my superiors, who would, I can assure you, be little likely to take such a lenient view of your case. What do you say?'

'Commandant,' I replied, with as much formality as I could muster as a counterpoise to his own, — 'my father was the first man to follow the great General across the Bridge of Arcole, though he never lived to get to the other side. It was my own wish to follow

the same great leader. But if I am not allowed to join the same service as my father, I am not the less ready to fight for France. If you want men for the navy, I will make one.'

I said this very bold, for I wanted to let this Commandant see that I thought something of myself, and not leave him with the idea that I was a mere boy, to be pushed aside like I was, all for the sake of a trifling fault which was not even proved against me; and as soon as I had got to the end of this surprisingly-long speech, the Commandant jumped to his feet, and saluting me as gravely as though I were his superior officer, all the other officers in the room standing stiffly as he did so, he gave me the impression that I had succeeded.

Being a mere civilian I bowed.

Then he sat down again, and shaking hands with me, said, in his usual voice, —

'Enseigne de marine Cortés, you will receive your appointment to the frigate *Republic* in a couple of days. In the meantime you have leave ashore. Go and enjoy it.'

Being an officer of the Republican Navy, I saluted, this time, and turned away; going off to tell the important news, for, to tell the truth, now that the thing was done, I was not a little flushed at finding myself, at my age, a real officer. I should have had to wait a year or two for the army; but now I was launched, and I wondered, with perhaps a prophetic sort of feeling, whether or not I should not be able to realize those grand dreams of advancement which the knowledge of the past greatness of my family had instilled in me, on that element which had always been a second home

to me; though I had had such small esteem for it as a career.

My relatives were much relieved at my appearance once more amongst them, for the least they had expected was that I should be immured, for a season, in some fortress; there to expiate my crime against the great Republic.

As I was myself so jubilant, they were able to collect themselves somewhat; and Aunt Selène was even able to leave her bed, which she had taken to, at the first, and to reappear in public once more. As for my Cousin Manuel, I had always thought rather little of him, and now that I was a real officer, whilst he, the poor fat fellow, had been overlooked as fit for nothing in the way of fighting, I did not fail to let him feel the difference betwixt himself and me, — an officer in the Republican Navy.

For the rest, I had nothing to do, for a short time, except to visit the tailors, to be fitted into my grand new uniform; and to pass the time amongst my old friends and acquaintances, receiving their congratulations, and to hear their envious greetings at my great position.

As for the injunction that I was not to sail my boat again, I ventured to set down that as naught; and I lost no time in proceeding to the quayside, and to launch my vessel into mid-stream; there to get hold of that message from my friend John, and read it at my leisure.

Nobody venturing to interfere with me, I pulled the nails out, and resting myself comfortably against the tiller, whilst my boat went sweetly before the wind, I then read what my friend had to say; which I had been waiting impatiently to do, for some time past.

The message was as follows:

MY DEAR FRIEND, MARCEL, – I hope you will find this note, – not too soon, – as I want you to know, as well as I can at present tell you, what has become of me.

First of all I must thank you, and get you to thank your friends for all the kindnesses which I have received at your, and their, hands, whilst I have lived amongst you. Also for the goodness of many of the people around you, who often surprised me by their friendliness to one whom you would call, I suppose, a ‘foreigner.’

Now for the programme which I have proposed for myself; though it yet remains to find if it is going to be a successful one or not.

I can very well see that I may be sent for, by your authorities at any hour now, and as I have made up my mind that I stand a much better chance of getting away from my present home than I should if I were to be taken farther from the sea, I have decided that I must cut away whilst there is the chance of doing so, and to wait for a certain opportunity which I see likely to come about. What I want to do is to get hold of that wonderful cutter of your neighbour, M. Lelage. I have been watching her, for some time, and have come to the conclusion that I should be able to work her, single-handed, for as long as it would take me to get to Gibraltar; even if I missed our ships, which are not such a wonderful distance away at present.

Anyhow, that is what I am going to try on, but as the cutter is away, just now, and as far as I can learn,

is not due back for the best part of a week, I shall have to stow myself away somewhere in the meantime; for things are not so rosy in the direction of the Commandant office as they have been hitherto; and if I wait any longer, it may be all U P with my attempt.

That will explain the mystery of my borrowing the money of you. I have to lay in a stock of provisions, both for the rest of my stay here, also for the voyage I propose. How it will turn out I cannot venture to prophesy; but I feel all serene about it, and I fancy that I am in for the biggest lark I have ever had. I am only sorry that I cannot take you with me, but, as an officer of His Britannic Majesty, it is my first duty to look after number one, and to get back to my post in the Royal Navy. Perhaps, too, you might object to be carried off by one who is one of your country's enemies; – which would be very right and proper.

Before I forget it, too, I want you to take the enclosed paper to M. Lelage. It is what we call an IOU which acknowledges my indebtedness for the yacht, which I do not consider as a prize of war, though I might have a legal right to call it so. (This is presuming I get hold of her.) Tell him that I apologize for the liberty I propose to take, and that I will remit the price of her, at a proper valuation, when I get home, and find the way clear to remit the money to France.

And so, my dear friend, Marcel Cortés (I forget your Spanish title), I will wish you, for the present, adieu. Some day, in the future, when our countries are at peace again, I will come and see you, and we will have some more adventures together; and, I hope, will get farther afield. Or perhaps you will come to

England. If you do so or if, as I suppose is possible in the present state of affairs, you manage to become a prisoner of war, bear in mind the address I give below, and do not fail to use it, for you would find a warm welcome await you, however you get there. It is:

JOHN R. FOGARTHY, R.N.

Care of the Right Hon., the Earl Fogarthy,
Oldcastle, Lancashire,
England.

P.S. I should not flourish my own title of nobility in your eyes but for the fact that my governor is by way of being a bigwig in our War Office; and a word from him means a lot to anybody who happens to be thrown amongst us, at present, so don't forget it. So, for the time being, Marcel, good-bye. — JOHN.

It was many months ere I got any clue as to where my friend had spent the ten days which he had to lie *perdue*, whilst awaiting the arrival of M. Lelage's yacht. Then, in one of my leaves ashore, I took it into my head to make discreet inquiries amongst the neighbours whom I thought it possible that he might have approached in the matter, but without any success.

But, one day, having the need to find a hidey hole for some small possessions that I had no room for, in my own small apartments, I invaded the upper story of my aunt's residence; a dusty loft which had still another apartment, of the very tiniest dimensions above it.

This I was suddenly struck with the desire to explore, and crawling carefully up the rickety ladder which

communicated with it, from the room below, I suddenly solved the problem.

Here, in a small box-like aperture, about six feet square, I saw evidences of human occupation.

A small pile of straw littered one corner of it, which certainly bore the impress of a human form; whilst a large jar, emptied, and a litter of paper, which had wrapped provisions in it, at some date or other, told me, clearly enough, that this was the place where some one had lain, for an indefinite while, in almost total darkness. The only light which reached the place was through the wall, whence a brick had been removed; through the orifice of which there was a view to be obtained of the quay, where the lighter craft of the district rode at anchor.

And it was here that my friend John had lain, for ten whole days and nights, snugly out of the way of everybody, watching, day after day, for the return of the yacht which he trusted to bear him across the seas.

Well, it was a tribute to the indomitable tenacity of purpose of which he possessed, I believe, more than any man or boy with whom I have ever been in contact. He deserved to escape, if ever anyone did.





Chapter 4

Now, in taking to a sea life (much against my will), I had an idea that I was doomed to be bored to death, if I were not done to death in any other way, by the utter inaction that seemed to have overtaken the French Navy at this particular period. The alternative was, of course, that I might very soon fall by an English bullet, in case we did have orders to put to sea.

For the difficulty which we laboured under was that of finding no place at all for us, on the wide ocean, owing to the activity and enterprise of those extraordinary Islanders, of whom my friend John was, I thought, the only one fit to be mentioned amongst civilized people.

A good many of our sailors took this idleness philosophically enough; but it did not happen to suit me.

I could see no possibility of advancement and pro-

motion that way; and, in accordance with the traditions of my family, I looked for some post that should give me the opportunity of regaining the lost importance of the race of the Cortés; and this did not seem likely to be offered by a service which seemed of so little practical use for Frenchmen, at this time of day. However, I was told that I ought to be thankful that my indiscretions in the matter of our English prisoner were visited by no worse punishment than idleness and security from foreign foes.

But it soon appeared that I was not even to get the security promised.

It was but a few days after the events written of in the last pages that I found myself drafted to a good sort of ship; a small frigate, whose sailing powers pointed her out to be the one, in all Toulon, which was at all likely to be used for active service. I had that consolation, at any rate.

This was the *Republic*, formerly *Le Roi Glorieux*, a Mediterranean built vessel, and, consequently, the best in the world; for we French beat the Islanders in that particular.

Our captain was, possibly, not quite so good as his ship; and I was early to merit his attention in a way that seemed to promise little for my comfort.

I never knew how it was that Captain Le Gros was so little disposed to be friendly to me, but it seemed to me that he bore me grudge, for some reason or other. I thought, at first, that it was because he was one of those men who, having a little ability, had climbed into a station which, formerly, would have been occupied by his social superiors; and that he felt some

grudge against all who, like myself, had more birth than fortune. He had many under him who were sons of the Old Nobility, and though he seemed to have no particular goodwill to any of them, yet he was harsher with me than with any of the others. But I suspect that the captain, who was from the same village as that which had the honour of being the birthplace of many of my race, had some old grudge against my family, of which I was to get the benefit.

Few of our officers or men had had any real touch of the salt water. Indeed, except the captain himself, I was about the most experienced mariner amongst them, having made many small voyages; some of them in my own little craft. But the bulk of us had been cooped up in port, in one vessel or another, ever since they had joined the navy.

The captain, though an inlander, had had a fair experience; and had even made a name as a sailor, and commander. Either by good luck, or good management, he had scraped through many dangers on the high seas, in the pursuit of his principal employment; which was to carry despatches between France and the Ionian Islands, which, at that time, the Republic was desirous of possessing. Later, the vessel had made several journeys to Egypt, where Napoleon himself was, at that time, cut off from all communication with his own country.

For the famous expedition to Egypt, – which was understood to be the first step towards the conquest of India, one of the most cherished possessions of our great foes, – was a failure. It had been a very attractive idea with Frenchmen, who had always grudged that

the English should have inherited that extraordinary country which had been first exploited by ourselves.

It had been very difficult to convince many Frenchmen that the task of invading India was beyond them; and there is no doubt in my own mind but what we could have done it, had it not been for that fleet which stood in our way, in so many directions. But people were beginning to cry out that the place for our great general was at home, where troubles were brewing all around us. Our government, at that time, was a Directory of five persons, who, for ever quarrelling amongst themselves, had begun to expose us to many dangers, besides having lost nearly all that had been gained by years of fighting. It was time, folks said, that there was a change of government; and they felt that the one man who was strong enough to effect this change, without plunging the country into fresh disasters in the process, was the great little man who was now in Egypt.

As soon as I joined the frigate there was a talk amongst the sailors that, at last, we were about to be employed in no less important a mission than the fetching our great general back to his native country; — when we should see what we should see.

Well, if there was one thing that could reconcile me to my dubious state on that ship, it was this.

But, for many days, nothing happened, except that all leave was cut off, and I missed the opportunity of visiting my friends and neighbours, in my uniform, to show myself in that glorious brand of my importance to the fighting forces of my country. Well, I had to put up with that, and many other things besides.

Our captain, himself, went on shore daily; coming back from his conferences with the Commandant, and any other officers of importance whom he met there, with a mysterious air; but disclosing no information as to the reason of his journeyings.

This went on, for some little time, when there came a change.

One day we took aboard a number of soldiers; which made it certain that we were in for a voyage of some sort, though whither bound we were not informed. The next thing, though, was to expect the blue water.

But this presented considerable difficulty.

The port, as I said, was being watched, at that time, so closely, that there seemed not the slightest possibility of our ever getting out.

We rarely saw the ships that were blockading us so effectually, but, of course, we knew very well that they were there. The rare neutral ships that occasionally visited us let us into the secret of that; and we well understood that the apparent shyness of the enemy vessels was merely a sign that they were trying their best to entice us out, when they could pounce upon us, at their leisure. To do them justice, they seemed brave enough, and only awaited their opportunity of seeing an enemy in order to rush to fight him, on almost any terms.

Thus, there they were, always cruising about just out of sight of us, and awaiting any move in their direction. Under such circumstances it is little wonder if there was very little sea-going from any of our former busy Mediterranean ports. However, the sea is wide, and there was always the possibility of our being able

to slip through the lines of British ships on some such errand as what we thought was designed for us, at that moment; – the fetching our great general back from Egypt.

This, however, was an object of concern. The voyage *had* to be successful and the commission was harassing our officers not a little.

I must say, too, that the soldiers we took on board were anything but a help to us.

They had overcrowded us, to begin with; and they were looking upon this voyage as a sort of holiday.

They were rough fellows from the Army of Italy; men accustomed to go from victory to victory, for two, three, and even four days in succession, under the great Napoleon; and it was not a little galling to see the airs they put on themselves in the face of our poor fellows of the navy, who could not get a victory at any sacrifice.

Personally, however, I was not to suffer long from this treatment, though my escape from it was due to a cause that did not give me much cause for self-gratulation.

Well, there had been vast preparations for our voyage, but, at last, they seemed to be complete.

We did not, however, immediately set sail. We were now moored outside the harbour, apparently in readiness for a move, whenever it should appear favourable to us. The captain no longer went ashore, daily, as had been his custom; but, on the other hand, boats brought him messages, as often as three and four times a day.

The soldiers soon became impatient at this, abusing

what seemed to them to be our cowardice in not setting forth immediately. But it was little they knew of the conditions of war upon the sea; and our men were only wishing they might have a taste of it, to take a little of the conceit out of them even if we were to be equally involved.

It was all very well, they were told, but the first thing that would happen would be finding ourselves surrounded by half a dozen big British ships, sprung up from nowhere; and then where should we be?

Our bo'sun rounded on one cheeky young sergeant, telling him that we were only waiting for a big storm to come along, when the enemy would find he had enough to do to preserve himself, in one of the sudden hurricanes of the terrible Gulf of Lyons; and wouldn't be able to bother about us. Then we should sail.

'But where should we be while the storm was on?' was the next query.

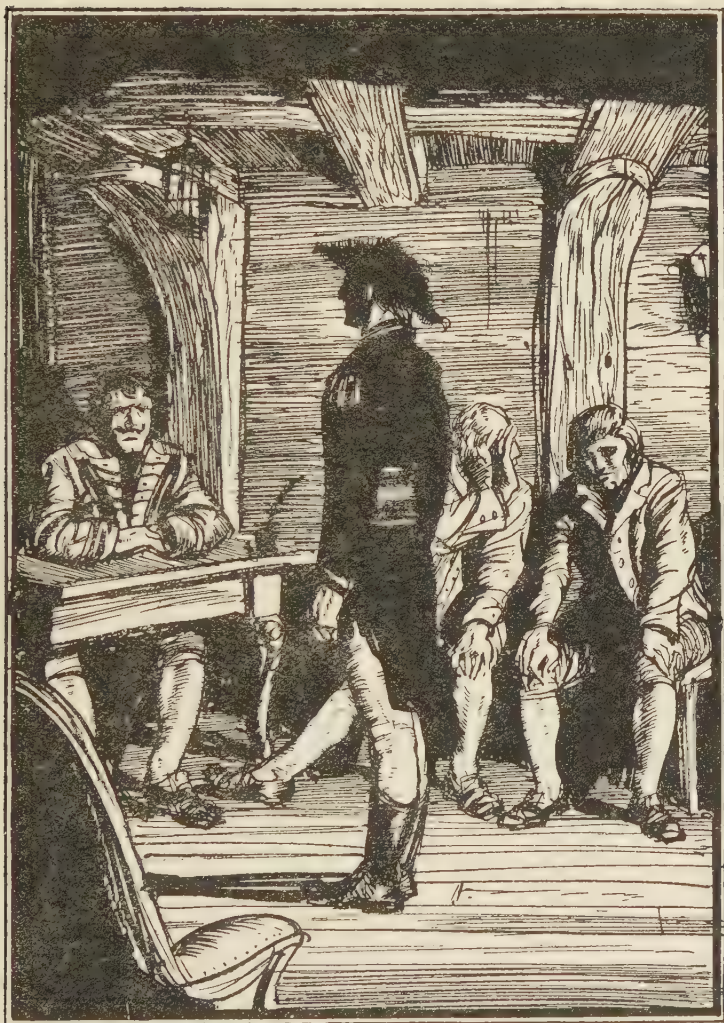
'Oh, in it! watching one another drown!' was the careless reply, which quite put an end to the comments for the time being; none of our land-heroes caring very much for the idea of facing a big storm on the open water.

However, if it were a storm we were waiting for, even that seemed to be unusually late in arriving that season; and it began to be very wearisome.

But one day there was a new development.

That day we could see that, quite as a novelty, three vessels in the harbour were being made ready for sea.

They were of a smaller class of merchant vessel, all well known to me, being, in fact, old acquaintances



THE CAPTAIN WAS SEATED THERE ALONG WITH TWO GENTLEMEN

of the sea, in which I had more than one trip. But, on this occasion, when they seemed ready to put to sea, they bore new names on their hulls, and were under flags that were strange to me.

I wondered what it meant, French vessels under a foreign flag; but I was soon made acquainted with the idea. I was sent for to go to the captain's cabin.

The captain was seated there, along with two gentlemen in civilian habits. I had not seen them come aboard, but I had heard that some high messengers, from the Directory at Paris, had come aboard at an early hour. One of them seemed to be a person of a quality less frequently to be met with now than in former times; – a noble, I conjectured, who had stood his ground when so many of his fellows had fled; and who now, as it appeared to me, from the general expression on his countenance, was experiencing regret that he had not followed the example of so many of his friends.

The other man was a specimen of what was now common enough. A man of the people, clever enough in his way, I do not doubt; but of a sort that it was often very dangerous to have any dealings with.

He was short in stature, but very broad and muscular; having an intelligent, but cunning face, with a quick eye that took in everything at a glance. He was mostly silent, but when he spoke it was with rapidity and decision. His manner was at once insinuating and masterful, as though he felt both the tradition of the servility of his race, together with the sense of his present position as one of the rulers of France. His dress was a mixture of the smug attire of the average

citizen, and the gaudiness of the old-time aristocrat; for he wore an immense and brilliantly coloured sash about his middle; a very large, and expensive hat; and some big decorations on his broad chest. He looked, indeed, more like the picture of a pirate-chief than a responsible member of the Republican Government. However, such was his function; and had I known, at that time, the extent of his power, I might have felt more concern than curiosity in finding myself in the presence of such a personage.

But I knew enough of the state of things in my country to be well on my guard, and I believe that my attitude was discretion itself. I had a suspicion that it was not altogether to my own benefit that I had been called into the presence of these men; for, apart from the recollection of my late misdoings, I had become aware of some secret hostility that the captain bore towards me. Also, as I could see afterwards, I was unconsciously imitating the bearing of my friend John Fogarthy; for he had so impressed me with his manly qualities, albeit but a lad of sixteen, that I think I may say that he had added a year or two to my experience in life, merely by his companionship.

For John had had his training early; and with the traditions of his aristocratic lineage, he had become a man early; and, except in his mischievous moments, which he seemed able to suppress at a moment's notice, he was as wary and calculating as any man whom I have ever met. And I felt that the present position was one in which my English friend was calculated to shine; which piqued me into a sort of rivalry with him, on his own ground.

In fact, it seemed to me, afterwards, that it was rather John Fogarthy than Marcel Cortés who went through that interview, in Captain Le Gros' cabin; standing there, with a cool head, and an appearance of unconcern, whilst he lost no word of what was said, and kept his mind on the need to penetrate the motives underlying the business, always with the view of avoiding the danger that appeared, dimly, to threaten; and even alert to extract the profit, if any, that might be got from the experience.

This, I am well aware, sounds rather conceited of me; but it is part of my history, and it will have to stand.

The first man to address himself to the business in hand was the aristo, as they were called.

'Is this the gentleman?' he asked.

'This is the officer,' said my captain, with an air of correcting the first speaker, who bowed, slightly, as if quite conscious of the alteration of his wording.

'Rather young, isn't he?' commented the third of the men.

'The enseigne has an experience beyond his years,' said Captain Le Gros.

I rather wondered what experience he was referring to; for it was my constant regret that I was getting so little experience in life that I should never be able to cut any figure in it.

But young fellows – at any rate those who have any concern at all for an object in life – are like that. They feel, as the years pass so slowly for them, though so quickly for the same beings when they get older, that they never seem to get any real change from their old,

dull routine; – that nothing ever happens to them; and that they are doomed to pass on into old age (twenty-one, or thereabouts), never having had a chance to get into the real world, or the opportunity of enjoying such success as they feel themselves capable of. – Well, I was ready to swear that I had never had any experience at all, up to the date of my joining the navy; which, itself, seemed destined to block, for ever, any chance that might otherwise have come to me of getting any advancement in life.

But the talk went in a way that seemed to reassure me a little.

‘And can you guarantee his seamanship?’ asked the smaller man, again.

‘There is no one in the port more capable of dealing with a small vessel,’ replied the captain. ‘And, furthermore, he knows the coast as few older men do.’

The small man looked at his taller fellow, who nodded gravely at him. Thereupon he passed the nod on to the captain as though he were according his high permission for some action of which I was yet to be made acquainted.

Captain Le Gros cleared his throat, and turned to me.

‘Enseigne de marine Cortés,” he began –

‘Pardon! Lieutenant Cortés,’ murmured the small civilian, looking at me with a slight smile which, for an instant, I took for mockery, though I did not see what there was to mock me for. But I do know that the moment this stranger, of a rather mysterious quality, addressed me as lieutenant, I stood an inch higher in my shoes. For rank was easily conferred in those days;

and I instantly resolved that since I had, by some queer chance, become an officer of rank in the French Navy, I would do my best to see that it was not as easily forgotten.

‘Lieutenant Cortés,’ began the captain again, with a bow to Monsieur, ‘you have been chosen for a difficult service for which your youth might have been esteemed a bar, had it not been for the special knowledge and experience which you have to fit you for what an older officer might esteem a special privilege. You will have a commission to serve the Republic in a manner which will enable you to gain glory and promotion. I will explain the matter to you.

‘There are three Muscovite vessels in the harbour, which we wish to forward to their destination, Barcelona. Now, we do not happen to be at war with Muscovy at present; and, in fact, it is the wish of the Republic to cultivate a great friendship with them; so that we are to do all we can to persuade them into alliance with us. At the same time, our bitter enemy, England, is doing all she can to avert this; trying to win over the Russian Tsar on to her side.

‘Now, these vessels must be got to Barcelona, in order to convey important news to the Spanish authorities; and it has fallen to us, in Toulon, to assist them in their course. It is only the services of a competent guide that they need, as there is no idea of fighting the English; but they might, though at peace with the perfidious English, be overhauled, and perhaps their mission perverted, if the English took any suspicion of their intentions; so what is needed is merely some one with special knowledge of the coast; which, indeed, is

about as rare nowadays as one with much experience of fighting ships. You have that knowledge; and as it is merely a case of a discreet flight before the enemy, and not an engagement, you can be as useful as any officer of more experience.'

The captain finished this elaborate address with a wave of the hand towards me, as though he wished me to adopt the service of my own free will. This I did, knowing better than to refuse. I expressed myself as being ready to undertake anything that I might be deemed fit for, in the service of the Republic.

Now I knew perfectly well that the vessels at the mouth of the harbour were only some rather decrepit old ships of our own merchant service; but being told that they were Muscovites, and that it was our purpose to get them safely to Barcelona, I had no difficulty in divining that the real purpose of the trip was to engage the attentions of the British fleet, so that the *Republic* might be enabled to proceed on that all-important mission to Egypt; to bring thence our general Buona-parté. All this fine talk of my service, and the title that was so lightly conferred upon me, was so much deception; and I was merely being sacrificed in this way because I could be well spared as a fighting unit. My experience of the coast, coupled with Captain Le Gros' unaccountable dislike of me, had procured me the dubious honour which I felt I must not refuse.

But I had no idea of shrinking from the task.

I had learned something from my English friend John, and I meant, if I came through the war right end up, that I would have something to tell him of the success of my countrymen on the sea. And I knew,

from his talk, that it was the 'tough' jobs that were most esteemed by those of his comrades who had any real desire to rise in their profession.

Well, there was a little more talk to be got through. My three mentors suggested their own ideas of the way in which I should bear myself, *in case* I was to be overhauled by the British.

I was to pose as a Russian, but to confess to a small knowledge of French, as it was not likely that the Islanders, who were well known as ignorant of Continental dialects, would have any knowledge of Russian; and I was to explain away their curiosity as best I could. But the best idea, of course, was to show them a clean pair of heels; and, at any rate, get into the waters of the neutral power of Spain before being overtaken.

'And now it remains for you to be ready to set sail just at nightfall,' said Captain Le Gros, in conclusion.

'Pardon, Captain,' I said.

'Eh?' he inquired, looking sharply at me.

'Pardon, Captain; may I not sail at the present hour?'

He looked at me with a glance of suspicion, and inquired, sourly, 'Why?'

'There have been sailings of French vessels, during the last few weeks, from this port,' I answered, 'and all of them have departed after nightfall, so that they might get safely through the British lines, in the darkness. Now, on each occasion, it has been their fate to find some enemy ship spring up where none was looked for; and all there has been to tell of their fate is some flashes of guns, in the open sea. Now, there is not an enemy vessel anywhere in sight. Would it not

be better for the flotilla to start whilst the English are beyond the horizon?’

The captain still looked his suspicion at me, but the two civilians seemed struck with an idea; for they leaned towards the captain, whispering. Then Le Gros looked at me again, saying, – ‘Lieutenant Cortés will retire.’

I saluted, and went out of the cabin, thinking to myself that I had given my three friends something to speculate upon.

It was quite half an hour ere I was recalled to them, and then I heard enough to convince me that what I had suggested had induced them to alter, somewhat, their original plans.

Said the captain, – ‘Lieutenant Cortés, you will start *one hour before sunset.*’ – Which rather settled my hash.



Chapter 5

THERE was no doubt in my mind that I had managed to make the matter just a bit worse for myself by my suggesting sailing by daylight instead of waiting for darkness. But the conclusion that was reached gave me increased assurance that it was really intended that I should fall into the hands of the enemy; with the best of intentions of engaging their attention, whilst the *Republic* was despatched upon its important mission to the East. In view of the importance of getting our great general back to his native country at this moment the sacrifice of a few small ships was an affair of very trifling consideration, whilst the sacrifice of Lieutenant Cortés did not count at all.

My mission, then, was to provide entertainment for our enemies, with the result that I should soon find myself a prisoner in England. However, it is a pity that they did not frankly ask my co-operation in it, for I should certainly have done myself the honour to consent. But as it was not my fault if I took it that my real mission was to get the vessels committed to my charge safely to Barcelona, and to avoid the English at all costs, I thought it would be something of a revenge if I managed that particular; and let my friends see that they had overreached themselves.

At the same time it was flattering to note that they had seized on my own suggestion, in a modified form, of making sure that the enemy vessels did actually get hold of us, but ensuring that they would do so at a greater distance from Toulon; thus assisting the main idea of attracting them to a greater distance than

otherwise, and leaving the way somewhat clearer for the *Republic* to proceed on her own business.

My 'flagship' was the smallest of the three vessels, but really the best sailer of them. I recognized her as an old coaster, in spite of the new daubs that pretended to give the schooner a foreign title. But it could have hardly been intended to deceive the enemy, which would have been impossible, in the long run. All that



was desired was to give him employment for a few hours.

I soon found out from the crewsmen that my idea was quite right.

They were longshoremen, several of whom I knew personally; and my first words with them gave me to understand that they had been favoured with more of the truth than their officer. In fact, they knew all that was to be known, having been heavily bribed for the business, which was, frankly, to take them from their

own country for a year or two, as prisoners of the English. And their reward had been safely received by the families they were leaving behind them before they had set foot aboard the vessels.

As for me, well, I was in for it, come what might; and as I fully intended to stick to the letter of my instructions, I found myself in a very interesting position in this, my first command; for if I were to suc-



ceed in getting the vessels to their alleged destination, Barcelona, avoiding the English, it looked as though I should be required to explain the mishap, afterwards.

Just before sunset, then, I set sail, with my 'fleet,' for Barcelona.

The course was well known to me, otherwise I might have felt some qualms as to the possibility of my ever reaching it. I may say that I had no knowledge of navigation, at that time, but I did know enough to be aware that there was such a thing, and that it was a

pretty complex affair. However, I had made the voyage in all sorts of vessels and knew all the coast in that direction. Also I was well acquainted with the type of weather that afflicted this part of the sea; and could tell what to expect next. In short, I was well able to find my way to my proposed destination in case there had not been a determined enemy between me and that point.

Darkness soon descended upon my enterprise, but I was well away before there were any signs showing of the presence of any British ship.

Sail was getting up on the *Republic*, as we departed, and if it had not been clear before, what was expected of us, it was so then. However, it didn't matter; and, feeling somewhat elated with the idea of a command of my own, I didn't bother about the way I had been deluded.

In an hour we were a good league on our way, and no enemy stirring.

All towards the south and east it was dark and lowering, and I might have entertained the idea that I was invisible to the enemy, except that we were sailing towards the sunset, though there was but a faint glow remaining. But it was sufficient, I knew, to show us to any vessel which had us between herself and the reddened west; so I simply had to await what news there might be to come from the British ships of war that were certain to be not far away.

The first rush took my own vessel somewhat too far advanced of my convoy, and I had, perforce, to slacken off a little, in order not to get too far ahead. Then another hour passed, during which we proceeded

at a slower pace, but still there came no sign of the presence of any British vessel. I began to think that we were becoming too successful from the point of view of those who had given me my instructions.

I saw nothing more of the *Republic* half an hour after our departure, but as I had expected her to be about to proceed in an easterly direction, I did not expect to see anything more of her.

I learned afterwards that she had simply stood off, on our own course; and, employing still other small ships as scouts, she had advanced leisurely towards the west; until, finding us, at a later hour, engaging the attentions of the British ships, she took the right moment to slip through the gap left in the British lines; and, proceeding still farther in the direction of the south-west, she got clear; and was able to continue her voyage without the smallest opposition. However, as she was now enjoying the benefit of the gathering gloom, which came from the south-east, we were unable to descry her presence.

It was towards midnight that the first sign came that we were being followed; and it came in the form of a cannon-shot. It was a signal gun, unloaded, and merely warned us to heave to. I saw in the momentary flash the outline of a vessel strange to me; a small brigantine; her sides pierced for several guns.

The thing then to decide was whether or not to obey this summons to heave to, and allow our vessel to be overhauled. But as I had had no instructions to let my vessel be taken, even if it were so desired by my commanders, I made up my mind to carry on, under all sail, and see what came of the matter.

The gloom of night had deepened considerably, so that I could barely make out the forms of my two followers; who, rather closely together, were labouring after us at a distance of perhaps half a league. As for the British vessel, or vessels, if there were more than one, I could make nothing of them out at all. The coast-line of France, too, low-lying at this part, was now also out of sight.

After a space of a few minutes there came another signal for us to heave to, but as there was still no attempt to damage us, I took no more notice of it than I had done of the other.

This could not go on for long, however, and I was not surprised at hearing the next shot ring out with a sharper note.

At this juncture I heard a voice at my side.

‘Any orders, sir?’ it asked, in a tone that was quite familiar to me.

I turned to look who had spoken, and found myself looking into the smiling face of one of my nearest neighbours aland, Antoine Pouchet his name was.

‘Well met, Antoine,’ I said.

‘Well met, sir,’ he replied. ‘May I ask you what you make of this commission, Monsieur Cortés?’

‘I am a good deal puzzled about it, Antoine,’ I answered. ‘What have you men heard?’

‘Asking your pardon, we *did* think we had been told rather more about it than our officer. We know that we are *not* expected to make Barcelona, or any other port. We are simply out as a cat’s paw for the frigate; and then we may go wherever we please.’

‘I thought that was the bottom of the idea, Antoine,’

I replied, 'but I was not honoured with the confidence. So far as I am concerned I have to make Barcelona, and then get home again, if possible; leaving you Russians to go where *you* please.'

'There is no going back, in any case,' said my friend, laughing.

'I think the same,' I said. 'But why did you men take the job on? You are not in the service, anyway.'

'The money, sir,' he said. 'It's a well-paid job, and as we were able to leave the cash safe with our families before we started, we saw no reason against a possible holiday in England. But I don't think that we are here to be shot at, sir; so I am to ask for orders.'

'Antoine, there doesn't seem to be a firearm aboard this ship at all. How about the others?'

'None there, sir. We declined to sail if there were any. We thought it necessary to prove to the English that we were harmless craft; because, of course, we could not fight such vessels as these, even if they were armed.'

'And what do you expect now?' I asked.

'To put about, as soon as it seems the time to do so; — with your permission, of course.'

'Well, we must do the best we can, Antoine.' I replied. 'The next few minutes will show whether we have done enough for our commanders' wishes.'

I was annoyed, of course, to see that I had been made a thorough fool, in this pretended command; where the very men knew more than their officer of the real purpose of the voyage; however, I did not see what I could do, except take the hint vouchsafed me

by my friend Antoine Bouchet. I was sure that none of the men would follow me in any attempt to achieve glory by fighting a way through the enemy, even if they had not been careful to see that no commander should expose them to unnecessary risk by having the means of putting up any show of fighting.

In the meantime the darkness had grown more complete, the sun having been below the horizon for some hours, whilst the moon was not due to rise till near morning. The sea had risen, though without any increase of wind; this betokening the possibility of a change of weather before many hours were over. Soon we had lost sight of the two other vessels altogether; and not knowing whether or not they had also lost us, I was rather in a dilemma what to do. Personally, I wanted to follow my orders to the letter; whatever had been the real intentions of my masters.

About this time there was another flash of a gun, at some distance to the rear of us; and this was followed by a corresponding crash. One of the other vessels was evidently beginning to feel the reality of the business. Under the circumstances, it was evidently their business what they chose to do about it.

‘Do you know, sir,’ said the voice of Antoine, out of the darkness, ‘I think the English ship has got between us and the *Susie* and the *Vicomte*. I wonder if they have missed seeing us, at all.’

‘Not a bad idea, Antoine,’ I answered. ‘But we shall have to wait for news.’

‘And if they are well employed, *we* don’t need to find our way to England at all.’

‘No!’ I said. ‘Barcelona!’

'Pardon! Not Barcelona, either. If our comrades are doing all that is required of us, all we need do is to show them a clean pair of heels. The schooner must be a faster vessel in a breeze of this sort than anything the enemy is likely to have with them.'

'Do you think so?' I asked.

'I am sure, sir. If you try her on a taut bowline those clumsy craft astern will never see us, after the first half-hour.'

'I don't suppose they can see us now, for that matter. We have got too far ahead.'

'We have done exactly what was asked,' said Antoine, insinuatingly. 'And if I am not very much mistaken the *Republic* has got through all right. If not, it is very little to their credit.'

'But we shall have to make very sure of that, my friend. Anyway we will wait for news.'

We were too far away to learn what damage was being done; though from the lack of any received by us, it seemed certain that we had managed to escape the notice of the pursuing vessels. Some noise of the crackling of timber came to us, however, telling that the other ships were being struck; and soon several lights showing themselves on the horizon seemed to denote that one or other of our friends was being boarded.

At this point my friend Antoine again appeared at my side. It was evident that he was being used as an ambassador on behalf of *my* crew. 'They have them, sir,' he said.

'Yes! Our turn next, Antoine,' I replied.

'No reason for that, as far as we can see, sir. They

have not seen us, or they would have fired on us, before this.'

'Then we are safe where we are. I shall stand off and on for an hour, and then set a course just before moonrise. We must feel certain that the *Republic* did get clear away, or it would not do to show our noses in Toulon again just yet.'

'The men would have preferred going back, sir; but if you think there is a doubt about it, I think they would rather keep away. They have their pay, but there is no reason for their running any risk from our own people. I will give them your decision, sir.'

So, with the permission of my crew, we lay very much where we were for another hour, without gleaning any more news; but at the end of that time, the look-out gave the signal of a boat astern of us. This might have meant that the enemy had caught sight of us, and were on their way to try conclusions with us, for all we could see; but we had scarcely caught sight of the boat when we heard the impact of it on our vessel's sides, touching us with sufficient force to upset the men who were rowing her. Then a volley of genuine French oaths told us that it was a company of our own men who were abroad on the face of the waters.

'That is Marc Gibe!' cried the voice of one of my own crew, at the side. 'Hallo, Marc Gibe!' he called out.

'Hallo, Jules!' was the reply. 'What are you doing here? Is that our flagship?'

'Yes! Coming aboard?'

'For a change of air. Yes!' with which the men in the boat made fast, and clambered aboard. There were

more than a dozen of the fellows in all. I rather wondered to see so many. They did me the honour to come aft, and report themselves to me.

‘The men of the *Susie* and the *Vicomte*, sir,’ said their spokesman. ‘You will know the ships better under their own names, than under the outlandish ones the authorities have been pleased to put in their places.’

‘How do you get here?’ I asked.

‘We were boarded, and taken, sir. And having permission to depart, we were making the best of our way back to Toulon. One of us professed to know the stars, sir; and we were trusting to him to take us in.’

‘You would have found out your mistake, when the moon rose,’ I said. ‘What had the enemy to say to you?’

‘Very little, sir. They seemed to have found out that their real business lay to the south of us; and having sunk the *Susie* by a cannon-shot, the comrades just had time to clamber aboard the *Vicomte*, when the English got up on the other side of her. They ordered us into the boat again, and put the brig before the wind. They were in a hurry, and did not stop to question us.’

‘They will not trouble us, then. What happened is that they were called off to follow the *Republic*, which one of their vessels had just sighted. Now, what is to follow. I can make any of our southern ports; or take you to Barcelona. But the question is, is the *Republic* going to get well through the enemy line. If not, it will be safer to keep clear of our own ports, until the matter blows over. If we get back to Toulon, too

soon, our masters will think we have not been very zealous in the country's interests. And you know what that will mean to us.'

The men had to ponder this, a little. I believe they had been altogether in favour of getting back home, at the quickest. But what I had to say served to remind them of the danger they stood in if it seemed to anybody that they had showed any lack of zeal in the service of the great Republic.

As they found nothing more to say, then, I ordered the sails to be tautened, and bore into the wind; and we soon put a few leagues betwixt us and the spot where we had encountered the British ships; so that if they had not yet seen us, which did not appear likely, they would now have some searching to do.

We had no further adventures with them, however; and soon after the rising moon showed us, far away to the south-east, a vision of several warships, scudding away in that direction; whether or not in pursuit of the Republic frigate I could not determine, as there was no sign of her visible from the spot where we lay.

Chapter 6

THE dawn when it came brought new difficulties. I had still to decide on a course of conduct, and the only thing I could think of, as a satisfactory solution to the problem, was to stick to the letter of my instructions, and to make Barcelona. What to do when I got there was a further perplexity. I had had no instructions on that point, for the satisfying reasons that my masters had been pretty well assured that I should never be permitted to reach that place. I could only conclude that, failing any further instructions from our authorities, I was at liberty to get back to Toulon, – if I could.

So far, so good; but there was still the possibility that the ideas of my masters would be amply justified by my finding the way to the Spanish port blocked by the enemy.

And such was the case, for scarcely had the sun arisen when a cry of 'sail ho!' called me on deck from my little cabin, whither I had just repaired for a modest meal; and there, straight in the line of our course was a large frigate which I was prepared to swear was none of ours.

There being nothing to do except to reverse the course of the schooner, I gave orders for that to be done; though the crew had already begun the operation without waiting for any instructions from their young commander.

The wind had not arisen, after all, during the night, so we really had little to fear, for the time. However had it not been for the distance betwixt us they might

easily have sent their boats against us; and then we had no means of defence.

There being nothing else to do, for the time being, I put a strong watch on deck, with orders to keep a good look out, at every point of the horizon, and then went below to finish my meal, in solitary grandeur.

Afterwards I sought for a chart, in the cabin lockers, though, for a long time, unsuccessfully. But at last I managed to dig one out that had apparently been abandoned as useless, as it was a very old one; and mice had been responsible for the loss of vast stretches of the continent of Europe. Nor did the remains of it convey any particular information to me. I knew very well that I was lost as soon as I left the vicinity of the French coast; and already I was quite out of sight of it. However, that did not matter much. So long as no enemy interfered with me, I knew that I could make the coast again, within a few hours; and my present intentions were to keep the sea, for a day or two; and then steer northwards again, and so make the coast, and home to Toulon; where no one could grumble much if I had managed to save one vessel out of the three which had been entrusted to me; and which they plainly never expected to see again.

I then took an hour's rest, and then went again on deck, where however, I felt myself almost *de trop*. Commander of the vessel I certainly was, but scarcely of the crew; and I felt that I should have to guess pretty correctly what it was agreeable for them to do, before I ventured to give them any orders; so, as they had already selected my friend Antoine Pouchet as an

intermediary between us, I followed their lead in consulting him.

‘Any news, Antoine?’ I asked of him, as soon as I got on deck.

‘None, sir,’ he answered, quite respectfully. ‘But the wind has gone lighter; and I think we may hear from the big chap yonder if it should die down altogether.’

‘You think they will use their boats, eh? Well, all we can do is to await the event.’

We had not to wait long, however, for they were evidently getting impatient on board the English vessel; and when no more than a couple of leagues separated us, they launched some boats, which began to put in our direction.

It was well into the afternoon, however, before the boats had succeeded in lessening the distance between us in any marked degree; but after that it looked as though it was only to be a matter of time before we were overhauled.

In another hour, however, and without the slightest warning, our schooner suddenly heeled over to a very sufficient breeze that sprang up from the south.

‘So much for the boats, then,’ I said. ‘Now we will try what the man-of-war is worth running into the wind.’

I then gave the order to starboard the helm, which was willingly obeyed, by the way; and setting a course of about twenty-seven degrees to the wind, which I knew would be sufficient to tax the frigate’s powers to the utmost, we went away; having the first impulse of the fresh breeze.

It was now out of the question for the row-boats

to overtake us, and all their crews could do was to await the oncoming of their vessel, for themselves to be taken aboard, and to continue the chase in her. But so long as our course, which circumstances seemed to have chosen for us, did not bring us into contact with any more of the enemy's vessels, we had not much to fear. Our schooner was certain to show the enemy a clean pair of heels.

The afternoon wore away without giving me the opportunity I sought of getting sufficiently ahead of the British ship in order to tack about, and go on a different course. We were now, I calculated, a good bit out of the track of any vessel that had Toulon as an objective; and the *Republic*, moreover, might have attracted some of the enemy ships from the vicinity, leaving the way clear for us. However, so long as the British frigate chose to keep us within sight there was nothing for us but to keep the same course.

Towards evening, we had her hull down on the horizon, and felt that we had nothing more to fear from her. I then put the vessel's head towards the west, intending to make a few leagues in that direction; and then, as soon as I thought it safe, to cut right across the course we had held for the last few hours; expecting to get within touch of Toulon after about a day and a half's sail.

Well, there is little more to tell of this first small adventure of mine.

We had effectually shaken off the pursuit of the British frigate; and we sighted no more vessels.

I now resolved to gain Toulon, if possible, as I saw no advantage to myself in retaining command of this

vessel; and I was anxious to find myself under some other person's control, once more; so, telling my trusty lieutenant, Antoine Pouchet, that I would work out the course to that port, I then left the deck to do so.

I had not given my crew any inkling of the idea that I was practically unacquainted with the science of navigation; and I did not mean to do so. I took the position of the sun, at midday, and calculated the speed of the ship, from time to time, by means of the log, at which my men were quite proficient; and, setting a course, with many grave instructions to the helmsman, I awaited the result.

But after all my well-intended calculations I think it was pure luck that, at daybreak, on the third day after our flight from the British frigate, we found ourselves in a most favourable position.

South of us was a line of warships, British, of course, who appeared to have just caught sight of us, for they were making efforts to overtake us. Whilst to the north was a line of coast; a town, with its harbour protected, east and west, by fortresses which came out into the sea to enclose the innermost portions of it; whilst to the south-west, and near to us, was a high headland, which I recognized as Cape Cepel.

'Toulon!' I said, with affected indifference. 'We will stand right in.'

I thought my crew had a little more respect for me after hearing this announcement; for I could see them standing together, talking it over, and looking after me.

Well, anyway, there we were; and in spite of all the efforts of the British ships, they were quite unable to

overtake us before we got within hail of the forts; and a little while served to bring us within the harbour.

And, breathing a sigh of thankfulness, I ordered a boat to be lowered, and went ashore to report the success, or non-success, whichever my masters chose to esteem it, of the voyage, to the port-commandant.

I was then much relieved to hear that our expedition was considered an entire success.

The *Republic* had followed us out of Toulon, as had been desired; and, taking advantage of the break in the line of the blockading vessels caused by the necessity of following us, had managed to slip through unobserved.

This had been already reported at Toulon, by an American vessel which had encountered her, subsequently, on the high seas; together with the reassuring intelligence that she was not being followed by any of the enemy's vessels.



Chapter 7

I WAS now, however, without a ship of any sort, my vessel being well on her way to Egypt (or so it was hoped); and this being so, I found myself on leave with permission to visit my home, at Seine, on the other side of the harbour of Toulon; there to receive the principal share of all the congratulations that were showered on the men who had taken part in the adventure. I found myself indeed treated, quite unexpectedly, as a hero; and not being averse to it, I was in for a good time.

This did, indeed, give me something more of respect for a naval career; especially as I was told that various captains had been attracted by the noise of my exploit to request that I might be commissioned to their vessels as soon as the opportunity arose for them to be made use of again. But just then opportunities of sailing the seas seemed likely to become fewer than ever for our poor navy.

For, just at that time, my poor country seemed on the point of plunging into a fresh series of disasters.

Our continual victories never seemed to lead to a peace of any duration. Indeed, they really had the opposite effect, for the different nations only seemed the more afraid of us, the more we beat them, and they were continually seeking new alliances for the express purpose of putting us down for ever. And perhaps it would have been better for us, in the long run, to have been content to remain in our own borders; but the martial spirit of the nation was aroused; and, – what seemed never to be understood, – our desire for the

liberation of the peoples of the world was really the moving force amongst us; and it seems hard that that desire for what was, after all, the happiness of others should have so embroiled us with the different nations, that they could consider us in no light but that of an enemy.

But it makes me proud to think that not all the disasters which the jealousy of other nations, coupled with those that the incompetence of our different governments brought upon us, ever had the effect of entirely quenching the desire we felt to extend the domain of what we believed in as the reign of liberty amongst the peoples of the world.

The troubles of the last ten years had, however, much impoverished us; and one of the uses to which we were compelled to put our numerous victories was to repair the ravages that were inflicted upon our resources. But even in Italy, which we had freed from their traditional oppressors, the Austrians, we were hated and intrigued against, by many of the princes, because of the habit which Napoleon had contracted of causing them to contribute towards the immense cost we had incurred in freeing their lands from the oppressors. And though I fancy that these people could well afford to pay their own expenses that way, it might have been better for us if we could have managed to do without their contributions. My hero, Napoleon, was himself accused of receiving bribes from the princes, in order to assist their own private schemes; and though I believe that he proved that he was innocent of any such thing, there is little doubt that some of his own generals were guilty. And so suspicion attached itself to even that great man.

But our great difficulty, just at that time, arose from the incompetence of the Directory; our government.

These men seemed to have too much power, and were jealous of one another, and generally uneasy in their positions.

This being so, they could hardly be expected to work together with that harmony requisite for the successful conduct of affairs; and the question of dealing with them was so perplexing that it came to be thought that only the speedy arrival of our great conqueror, and the entrusting to him of absolute power, could avert some nameless disaster.

But, after that; – for men were not content to look forward for but a short space of time; – after that, it was asked, what would have to be done to curb the power of the conqueror himself? – Truly, it was a perplexing situation enough.

As far as I was concerned, though, I was content to look no farther than to the assumption of absolute power by my hero. I was young enough to feel the greatest confidence in a man of such genius; feeling the thrill of his victories; and, in the generous flush of youth, I could not but feel that such a man would have the instinct to do what was right for his distracted country. For greatness and goodness, I truly believed, went together. I have since found out that that is not always the case.

After all the trouble we were at in order to get the frigate, the *Republic*, to the east, it was not that vessel which had the honour of rescuing our great general from his dubious position in Egypt.

Even whilst our frigate was on its way to Egypt

there appeared, one day, in the port of Marseilles, another frigate, *La Muiron*, with the great little man on board; for, with the invariable good luck which at that time, at any rate, never failed him, he had managed to board one of our vessels; and eluding the vigilance of the tremendous Nelson himself, he had managed to reappear once more on the soil of France.

So I had missed nothing from not being able to take my share of the voyage which was to bring back my hero in the ship to which I had been appointed. Indeed, it seemed that, in the end, my course was destined to take me clear from that ship, whose captain, I felt, had some unknown cause of enmity against me, which caused me a little uneasiness. Anyway, I never sailed in her again.

It was but a few days after the events recorded in my last page that I was walking rather aimlessly through the streets of Toulon, when I came across a small crowd of persons who seemed to be following, at a little distance, a group of military men, coming rapidly towards me.

Not liking to copy the style of these persons by displaying any curiosity as to the persons they were following I was just on the point of turning into a side street when I heard my name called.

I instantly pulled up, turning to see who had addressed me in this tone of authority, when I saw the Commandant of the port, with a smaller officer; who, however, seemed to be a highly-placed one, for all his meagreness. A general, I thought to myself.

He was a short, thin man, though with a fair breadth of shoulder; about thirty years of age, I guessed. His

uniform was very rich, and he seemed to display a great number of orders, as though he had seen much successful service. I did not see his face clearly, at the first, as it seemed rather overwhelmed by his great hat, and the general gorgeousness of his garb; but when I did so, I noticed the excessive pallor of his complexion; his rapidly-changing expression of countenance; and his lively eye, whose glance changed from lively good-humour, to one of extraordinary sternness, at the very smallest notice.

This personage looked quietly on whilst I advanced towards the Commandant, who had called me, nodding when the latter made an allusion to my name, as though he recognized it.

‘So this very young gentleman is Lieutenant Cortés, is he?’ he said, with a smile. And he laid his hand on my shoulder, and looked earnestly into my face, as though to read my character, minutely.

I returned his glance, as steadily as I could, not having the faintest idea who he was. I stood, at that time, about three inches taller than himself, and looked down upon him, with respect, but with as cool a glance as I could manage. I found it rather difficult to maintain this, but I managed it, for a few seconds; and the great man himself was the first to turn away.

He laughed a little as he turned aside, and, patting me on the shoulder, he said, – ‘Lieutenant Cortés, I have heard of your exploit, and I wished to congratulate you upon it. You have great good fortune, Lieutenant; and let me tell you, that is a gift not to be despised.’

I bowed my acknowledgment of this speech, and

awaited any further pronouncement he might choose to make.

The little man, whose importance I was beginning



to suspect, said nothing more for a moment. He stood there, his hands behind him still looking me over; but, before turning away, he said, 'Some day I may send for you. Do not fail to come,' then, turning away, he

went off, chatting gaily to the Commandant, who had stood by in respectful silence.

It came upon me, then, who it was that I had been



standing in the presence of—the great Napoleon Buonaparte, himself.

Rather overawed by this idea, I stood respectfully at attention until the two officers had got well out of

the way; and then, avoiding the crowd, which seemed inclined to transfer some of its curiosity to my own person, I turned into a side street.

I had caught a word or two of the conversation between the two officers before they had got right out of reach.

The important little man was saying, with a laugh, 'I assure you, Commandant, it is not mere talent with one. It is of the greatest importance that one should enjoy good fortune also.' And then they were out of hearing, but the words remained in my mind, and I have pondered over them, curiously, many a time since.

I have had to wonder what precise value the great man himself put upon the sentiments he then expressed. I think I may have solved the problem since his star has waned; for it has come to me that the wonderful man, whatever his own belief was, made it his business to impress the idea of his special favour at the hands of Providence upon his followers so that they might have that complete confidence in him that it should never be thought that the tasks that he set himself should be too big for achievement. But for twenty years it did truly appear as though that extraordinary man enjoyed the special protection of the Higher Powers.

But I had scarcely turned away from this interview before I became aware of a great opportunity I had missed.

A word, just then, as to the wish of my heart to be allowed to join the army, so as to be able to follow my hero in his wonderful victories; and the whole plan of my life would have been different.

And I had missed it.

Turning back, instantly, I made my way in the direction that my hero had taken, as quickly as I could walk and preserve that dignity which became an officer of the Republic, but I was too late.

Turning the corner of the street, I emerged into the great square before the *Hôtel de ville*, and saw Napoleon already on horseback; and with a wave of the hand to the Commandant, and followed by a small group of staff-officers, he went off at that speed that he was famous for; and was gone out of my life, for years, as quickly as he had come into it.

I was stunned then at my misfortune; but it had one good effect: I made up my mind, on thinking it over, what a fool I had been, and all that, – I made up my mind that my life had been laid down for me by some Higher Power; and that it had not been in my power to change it.

I thought that it was, after all, not for nothing that I had led a life so much upon the water, at a time when my poor country so required the services of men who had a natural talent for dealing with ships; and though my own ideas had been so tinged with the ambition to rise to the position which my forebears had occupied, by the one road of the army; yet it did seem to me that everything led me to the sea, and that I ought to be content to seek my career upon the water.

And, at any rate, though I might as well acknowledge that, at the bottom, it was an instinctive avoidance of the real truth of the matter, namely, that I did not like to acknowledge that I had merely made a fool of myself in letting slip the magnificent opportunity that

I had had; some good did come of it. For I made up my mind, then and there, to regard the sea as my natural business in life; and afterwards I stuck to the idea, with all my natural obstinacy; so, whether or not I was to be looked upon as a fool for being so little awake to my own advantage, just at the time when I was so well placed to achieve my object in life; it appears to me that the small measure of success that did come to me, in after-life, was the result of my decision at that moment.



Chapter 8

THE incident recorded in the last chapter, slight though it may seem, made a deep impression on me.

I had, at last, come into personal contact with my hero, Napoleon Buonaparte; though it was without knowing (at first) who he was. But I had, unfortunately, lost sight of him almost as soon as he had crossed my path; and though I had been greatly delighted with the idea that I had spoken to this demi-god of war, and even been favourably noticed by him, I had rather a bad time afterwards, in thinking what a poor hand I seemed to be at taking advantage of what opportunities came my way.

However, the opportunity was gone, and now I became restless for want of some employment which should give a chance to repair my omission by gaining some more practical knowledge of my work in the sea-service. But I had to wait for this, as adventures did not seem to come to me at will, as they did to my English friend, John Fogarthy; who, in default of any spontaneous happenings, seemed able to devise his own interesting adventures.

I did have one piece of news, however; for my exploit at sea, small as I thought it at the time, brought to light a relative of mine who was in a better position in life than any of my family had been for a number of years.

This was an old attorney of Paris, who, attracted by some casual references to one of his name, had the curiosity to inquire if I could be any relative of his own.

This ended in revealing to me the existence of a very distant cousin of my father's, who, beginning life as a poor village lad, had managed to accumulate a most extraordinary fortune in the law.

However, I was not to learn, at that moment, how this affected me; and I learned little more than his name. Also I did not become aware that he had no other relatives in the world except myself, and, in a minor degree, my aunt and cousin; or that, being attracted to me, he was ever afterwards to keep a close eye on my career; intending, if I pleased him, to revive the ancient glories of our family by leaving me his great property.

Had I known this, however, it might have had a bad effect on me, by bringing me to neglect the cultivation of that sense of responsibility which he wished to see in me; with, perhaps, some alterations in his own intentions. For this is the way in which I have seen many young fellows lose the advantage which their circumstances seemed to warrant their expectation of.

But, from the fact that Paris is so very far away, and travelling difficult and rather dangerous, we had no opportunity of meeting. So I really learned nothing of him, and managed to get an idea of him as being, probably, some tiresome old fellow surrounded by a host of needy, greedy relatives who might grudge me the acquaintance of a man who could leave me something that they claimed for themselves. So, as I said, I was luckily ignorant of the fact that I had the chance of succeeding to an immense estate; and was constrained to carry on as though everything depended

on my own exertions; which was exactly what my lawyer relative desired.

But my fortune was still to win, and I now began to look about me, rather anxiously, for some means of advancing it.

My friend, Captain Dumergue, had been moved from Toulon, having got his step as a general in the Austrian army.

This title, I must explain, simply meant that portion of the French army which was operating against Austria, and not the national army of Austria. For we had various armies, and they were given the name of the country they were fighting against; it being quite an accepted thing that when our men were sent against a foreign power, they were to make that power a province of France, in the space of a few months. Thus the title went with it.

Captain Dumergue's successor was a certain Colonel Pierrepont; and it pleased me to see that the new Commandant seemed disposed to succeed the Captain as a personal friend of mine, as well as to his post.

He showed me a good deal of favour, and I was not exactly surprised when, one day, he sent for me, and proposed that I should accompany a young nephew of his, also a naval lieutenant, on a visit to the latter's father, who lived in an old château a few leagues from Toulon, at a place called Aix.

This young man, André Pierrepont, had been a good deal in my company, lately, and being tired of being unemployed, he had worried his uncle for leave to visit his father, who was reported ill; and he had him-

self suggested, I suspect, that I should be allowed to go with him for company, and perhaps protection.

He got it, and with many injunctions from his uncle to look well after ourselves, for the country was by no means safe even for a couple of French youths to roam about in, we departed.

The Commandant armed us with pistols and short swords, giving us strict injunctions never to get into the position of having to make use of them; which, of course, we lightly promised; never feeling that we needed to trouble ourselves about such absurd precautions, as young fellows do; and so we started off.

We had to go on horseback, too, which was a new experience for me, though I took to it as a duck takes to swimming. And off we went, André professing an adequate knowledge of the road, from having travelled along it once before, about a dozen years previously. He was now nineteen.

Well, it was winter time, but the sun was warm, and everything as pleasant as it could be. And we made the horses 'go,' as was only to be expected from a couple of heedless young fellows out for a holiday.

For an hour or two, we covered the ground at a commendable pace. We passed through one or two small villages, but were too exhilarated to stop at any of them. It did not seem to me that André was having any trouble about finding the road, for he never seemed to inquire; and I took it that he recollected it so well that he had no need to bother; and had complete trust in him.

So I had no questions to ask, and we simply went on, league after league, until the horses themselves seemed

to suggest the desirability of a halt by lagging along, at a slow pace, and stopping every now and then to look longingly at the patches of roadside grass.

‘Oughtn’t we to stop for a while, André?’ I asked, at last.

‘I suppose we ought,’ he replied. ‘Wait a bit, though,’ he added. ‘Let’s have a lark with these people.’

We were just entering a town of somewhat more pretensions than any we had hitherto met; and, wondering what sort of ‘lark’ André had in his mind, I followed him without question.

Putting on a brisker pace, at this juncture, just when we were approaching the centre of the little town, we indulged in a gallop; which my friend quickened as we approached some rather important-looking individuals, who stood together in the main street, looking at us with an expression as though they expected us to stop and give their excellencies an account of ourselves.

Just as we were on the point of reaching them, however, my friend put his horse at its best speed, shouting out, ‘Out of the way, good people! We bear despatches for Paris.’ And out of the way they scampered, calling to other people farther down the street to do the same. And so we passed right through the town, every one making way for us, and bidding their neighbours do the same; eyeing us with some degree of awe, as persons playing an important part in the life of the nation.

Of course I followed André’s lead, putting on pace, and enjoying the game; which we kept up till we had got quite clear of the town, where, on coming to a rather steep hill, our horses came to the conclusion



that they, at any rate, had had enough; for they stopped and refused to budge another step.

‘I say, that was a lark! Wasn’t it?’ said André, as he slid down off his horse.

‘Yes!’ I answered. ‘But how do you get off this sort of thing, André?’ I asked him, for I was trying in vain to imitate him, and to get off my own horse. But I was so stiff with the unaccustomed exercise that I simply couldn’t get my off-leg over the saddle.

‘Hello!’ he replied. ‘I was forgetting that you had never ridden before. You were doing so well. Just pull your feet out of the stirrups, and let yourself roll off. I’ll catch you.’

I managed to get off with his assistance, and we stood together in the road, whilst our fiery steeds immediately betook themselves to the side of the road, where they heard the welcome trickling of water in a ditch.

‘Not a bad joke,’ said André, who seemed to want to extract the fullest amount of amusement out of our little adventure. ‘Did you see how that fat old fellow began to push everybody out of the way, as soon as he heard how important we were. He would be monsieur le maire, I should think.’



‘Yes! He looked imposing enough. I thought he was on the point of ordering us to stop and give an account of ourselves, until you commanded him to get out of the way. Then he jumped right round, and transferred your excellency’s commands to all and sundry.’

‘Yes. Do you know, though, I think we made a mistake not to stop just there. I fancy the best of the joke would have been to let them treat us to a banquet, in accordance with our importance. I am sure they would have done. Could you have kept up the joke, Marcel?’

‘I think I could have done anything for a good hot dinner,’ I replied. ‘I am beginning to feel as though I had had nothing for days.’

André pondered over this. ‘Yes!’ he said, ‘I am beginning to feel rather like that myself. I am afraid, though, that it is too late to repair the omission at this place. We should look so small if we were to go creeping back, and to go to an inn, just like ordinary people, after sweeping through the place as though it were too small for the likes of us. We shall have to put up with it. It’s lucky your good aunt made us bring that pile of bread and cheese along with us. I rather wanted to get out of it; but it will come in useful now.’

'Yes! It is lucky, isn't it? But hadn't the horses better have a meal? They can't go on for ever, especially at the pace you set.'

'They ought, poor beggars, but they will have to wait now. Well, let's sit down now, and browse on this homely provender. We'll mend the matter at the very next town. You see if we don't.'

I think that André meant that we would humbug the authorities, and get that banquet out of them that he rather regretted missing on the present occasion; but it remained to see if we were so successful in imposing upon any other townspeople as we had done on the unsophisticated inhabitants of this particular place. However, we now set about making ourselves as comfortable as we could under present circumstances; and following the horses' example by taking a drink at the roadside, as soon as the water had got clear after their own operation, we sat down to discuss our bread and cheese; leaving the horses to themselves, though they were doing by no means badly, having wandered into a neighbouring field.

'I'm wondering,' said André meditatively, as he munched his provender as he called it, – 'I'm wondering what town that was. It ought to be – it ought to be – Now, there, I quite forget what it ought to be. But I must know it all right. I've been through it before.'

'When?' I asked.

'Oh, it's only about twelve years ago. But I should have recognized it, right enough, only you went at such a pace that I had no time to look fairly at it. It ought to be – Oh, confound it! It doesn't matter a bit what it ought to be. We'll put the geography right at the next place.'

Which was quite satisfactory to me.

We had a good hour's rest, feeling much refreshed; and then, after another drink at the stream, we thought it time to be getting on.

'The horses don't seem to think so, though,' commented André, as, on trying to come up to them, they simply trotted farther into the field, and began operations on a fresh patch of grass there.

'What do we do now?' I inquired, with, perhaps, a little touch of sarcasm in my voice, as the animals continued to elude us.

'We catch these brutes, somehow,' said my friend crossly. 'Hey! Come here, you idiots!' he called out; but the animals, not recognising themselves under that term, didn't come here.

In the end it took us quite half an hour to catch the first of them, and there still remained the other.

We sat down to think over ways and means. We were tired out with our exertions, and we eyed the brute, which was just at the other side of a high hedge, tantalizing us, as André said, with rather hopeless feelings.

'How the deuce are we to manage?' my friend asked. 'It's getting time we were away. We've already lost more than we gained on our original programme by dint of pushing on this morning. We shall have sunset on us, if we don't look sharp. What are we to do, Marcel?'

'I know!' I said, with confidence. 'All you have to do is to jump over this hedge, and try to land on the brute's back.'

'Oh! Is that all?' he replied. 'Well, if I didn't know

the awful respect you had for your seniors in the Service, I should be led to suspect that you were trying to pull your senior officer's leg. But of course you weren't.'

'Oh no!' I replied meekly. 'I should only be putting it into his eminent head to use his leg for kicking me. But without joking, here's a tree handy. Couldn't you climb it, and drop on to the brute's back from that point of vantage?'

'I really think you have hit it, so I won't hit you,' said André. 'Now, how to accomplish the feat without raising this wily animal's suspicions. That's all that needs to be done.'

With a great deal of care André managed to climb the tree, sitting there quietly until the horse approached him in the course of his wanderings. Then, at last, I heard the sound of a falling body, followed by a sigh of satisfaction, and a rearing up of an offended steed; which told me that André had got on his horse at any rate. And all that remained then was for me to get on mine.

'Now then, Marcel, mount lad, and let us be off,' said André, spurring his horse into the road again.

But that was easier said than done, for my horse, having conceived a contempt of my ignorance of its kind, now began to circle round and round, at the length of the bridle, seeming to spurn my puny attempts to control it. After a good deal of observation and accumulated experience however, I hit on the idea of guiding the animal nearer to the hedge, when his movements were, for a moment checked; and with a desperate leap, I managed to get on terms with the saddle once again.

'Oh!' I was forced to cry out, as soon as this matter had been settled.

'What now?' asked André.

'I'm most extraordinarily sore,' I said.

'So am I,' he retorted; 'but I shouldn't have thought of mentioning it. It'll wear off. Come on, old man; we shall never get anywhere at this rate.'

'I guess this is a case of the hare and the tortoise over again,' I said. 'If we hadn't got on so fast this morning, we should be a lot farther on our journey at this time.'

My friend grunted, in reply. He did not want to contemplate the results of his leadership of the expedition. Accordingly we now went on at a much more reasonable pace; and for a long time we found nothing to remark upon.

After a long period of silence, however, he asked me if I did not feel it getting to be a bit cool.

'The sun's getting a bit low,' I answered. 'We had better be looking for lodgings at the next place.'

'Well, there's one just over the brow of this hill,' he replied, though I thought he was looking round him with some uncertainty.

However there *was* a small village just over the hill.

'Now,' said André, brightening up, 'this should be – this should be – Oh! what the deuce should it be? I am forgetting, but I must know quite well.'

'Why not ask this fellow?' I suggested, seeing a countryman come along.

'Oh, never mind him. It will come to me soon. We won't let anybody know more about us than we need. We don't know the people in this part of the country,

anyway; and my uncle told us to be careful. Let us arrive, that's all.'

We soon got to the place, but there was very little of it when we did so, it being a small, wayside village, of not more than a dozen houses, though it possessed an inn.

This place André chose to dismount at, not caring to risk losing an opportunity of getting a meal by going any further; and very soon we were seated before the first decent meal we had had the refusal of since leaving Toulon. Having fed, and rested our steeds, we were in a position to think about the rest of our programme.

André had left me to my own resources, for a time, whilst he went to look over things, as he put it. In a while he came back, looking rather disturbed.

'I say, Marcel,' he said, 'I don't altogether like the looks of this place. I thought that funny-looking man who took our horses was the servant of the place. But it appears he is the landlord. He looks rather a ruffian. And the place is very small. I thought we should hardly be comfortable, spending the night here. So I ordered the horses to be brought round, and the ruffian aforesaid looked as though he wanted to dispute our right to depart. I think we had better move out.'

'That's quite all right for me,' I said; so, the horses being brought round, we mounted.

'Well, we had a good dinner, but I think that low-looking rascal must have stolen it,' commented my friend, as soon as we were out of earshot of the inn. 'As for the rest, we may have saved our throats from being cut by quitting that place; so, heigho! for the next decent-sized town.'



Chapter 9

WE still had an hour or two before it would be entirely dark, and we did no more loitering; though as for galloping, our horses would have none of that; choosing their own pace, and taking no notice of our occasional recommendations to mend it. However, we got on a good distance from the village we had thought so little of, though we did not come upon another so quickly as André had prophesied we should.

As we left the low-lying ground at a little distance from the village, we came upon an open heathland, a little nearer the sky, and my friend, looking about him, said, – ‘Now, this is where that place – what is the name, confound it! I have forgotten that, too. But this is where it should be, anyway. It ought to be,

— Oh, never mind! The thing is, where has it gone to?’

‘Has the town followed its name into oblivion, André?’ I asked.

My friend, however, made no reply to my sally, but looked round him, rather disturbed. So we went on, in silence, for another league.

We were now in the midst of a barren-looking heath which extended right to the horizon, on every side, without the vestige of any habitation. It was getting quite dusk, too, and it seemed to be quite time for us to be approaching some inn, where we could put up for the night, especially if we wanted to choose a suitable one.

‘Well,’ said André, after a long, silent survey of the country, ‘I would give in now, and condescend to ask of anybody where we are, if only anyone would show his face. But the queer thing is that we don’t seem to meet anyone now. It’s a sign that we are off the beaten track. What do you think, Marcel?’

‘I think you must be about right. The question is, are we to go on, or to cut across our tracks, and chance finding a different route?’

‘Not so easy, by this light,’ he replied. ‘You see, once off the track, which certainly does lead somewhere, we shall have to go very slowly in order to avoid pitfalls and broken ground, and we should never arrive anywhere. No, we shall have to continue as we are, that is, if our steeds are willing.’

But the animals presented a difficulty. They had obviously had enough of it for one day, and they were showing an increasing disinclination to go forward

at any pace at all; and the best we could get from them was a slow crawl that, at length, induced us to dismount to ease them by walking by their sides. But we found that we were so stiff by the unaccustomed exercise that we did not mend the pace by so doing. Soon, however, we found ourselves opposite a small tree, which was the only one, for a good length of the road, that was higher than ourselves, and coming to it André, without a word, tethered his horse to it, leaving me to follow his good example. Then we sat down for a rest.

‘This is a shade better!’ he said, as he lay back luxuriously. ‘We’ll have half an hour, at any rate, and let the Republic go hang.’

I followed his example, finding it a very good one.

‘Hey! Don’t go to sleep!’ I heard a voice calling out, from some far-distant spot. I awoke.

‘I wasn’t asleep,’ I declared sheepishly.

‘Oh! I’m glad to hear that one of us was awake,’ replied my friend. ‘I was asleep, right enough. But we mustn’t indulge here. It will be very cold in this open spot before long. I wonder what time it is. Hey! Where’s the sun?’

It had gone on its way, the same as we ought to have done. The moon was up, in the west, giving us a fair amount of light, but, of course, no heat. André studied it attentively for some minutes.

‘Do you know,’ he said, at length, ‘we must have been lying here, for at least four or five hours. Look at the moon. It is at first quarter, and it is so low down that it will sink in less than an hour. Now it was at the zenith, as they call it, at six o’clock. It will set at twelve, and now you can guess what time it is now.’

'Eleven, or thereabouts,' I answered.

'Precisely! Well, we have been left out of the world for to-night, and we shall have to make the best of it. I can only hope that I have convinced you of the value of a good guide, – by the absence of one.'

'Oh, never mind, André. I'm fairly comfortable, all things considered. Do we go on, now. Or do we stop here and freeze to death?'

'I think you had better go on and leave me to a well-deserved fate. But if you don't mind your poor friend accompanying you I will e'en trudge by your side. – Now, it's that confounded town that's puzzling me. It certainly ought to have remained where it was put. I suppose we haven't come through it in a state of somnolence. Do you think we did?'

'I don't think so. Besides, I should certainly have woke up if I had got near the scent of a hot supper.'

'I think I should, too. Anything warm would have aroused me. Never mind, though. We have all the world in front of us. Let us go and look at it.'

We then roused up the horses, with a little difficulty, and went on, being rewarded with a little warmth. We had not gone far, however, when my friend, who was a step or two ahead of me, stopped suddenly, putting out his hand to warn me to stop also.

I stopped my horse, without a word, and waited for him to explain. 'Civilization!' he whispered to me, enigmatically. 'Do you see that small pole ahead of us? That's the topmast of a small vessel. We are a good deal out our track. We must be right on the coast.'

'Or on a river bank,' I suggested.

'Most likely that,' he assented. 'But we may as well be cautious. Hold my steed whilst I go and reconnoitre.'

He put the bridle of his horse into my hands, and went quietly forward. Soon I lost sight of him, as he seemed to descend into the bowels of the earth. He was out of sight for a good quarter of an hour when he reappeared, looking rather excited.

'We're all right, Marcel. We can get lodgings. There's a small yacht moored on the river, and there's nobody about. We may as well borrow a night's lodgings and be under cover. Come along and see what you think about it.'

I was agreeable enough to have a look at the prospect, and followed where he led, bringing the horses along. After a short walk we descended the banks of a small tidal river, and found there the yacht André had referred to. It was fastened to a small landing-stage, fore and aft, so that it could not veer about with the tide.

We were both a bit doubtful about the strict legality of our proceedings, but we were nearly dead asleep, so that must be the excuse for our acts. Anyway we tethered our horses to a post near by, and went aboard.

We were not too inquisitive as to the vessel, merely satisfying ourselves that there was no one aboard, and we descended into the cabin. This was scarcely larger than a cupboard, but it was snug and warm after our experiences ashore. We then sat down, discussing, at some length, the best way to apologize for our intrusion on private property, when we should meet the owner; but eventually we decided that the best thing to do

would be to get up betimes, the next morning, and be off before anyone could find the liberty we had taken. That, we argued, would be the best thing for all parties. Which being settled, we instantly fell asleep on it.

Scarcely had I fallen asleep, however, than I woke again with a start. I found that I had rolled off the settle I reposed on, on to the floor; but rousing up, I recollected in what sort of a lodging I had fallen asleep. Looking round, in the dim light, and seeing that André still slumbered, I reached across the cabin and woke him.

‘André,’ I whispered, – ‘what’s going on?’

‘Eh?’ he said, opening his eyes, and yawning, – ‘time to get up? What a shame. I’d only just got to sleep. We shall have to have just another little snooze.’

‘No! Wake up!’ I said, in some alarm. ‘I’m sure the ship’s moving.’

‘Are we aboard?’ asked my friend with a good deal of astonishment in his tone. ‘Yaoop!’ he called out as he rolled off his locker, in another lurch of the yacht. This, however, seemed to bring him to his senses.

‘Marcel,’ he whispered, ‘we’re in a mess. The tide has risen, and the yacht has broken from her moorings. Let’s get out and see to it.’

But at this moment the boat gave another lurch, and I could feel that it was not merely the rolling of a ship on the waters, but was too like the bending to the breeze, and the plunge forward of a sailing vessel under the influence of a stiff breeze. I was convinced that we were under sail; and in the open sea. This *was* a mess.

'We're under sail,' I whispered, and André came over to me.

'Phew!' he said, in a comical whisper. 'This will be a surprise for the owner. What's to be done? He may conceivably not appreciate our intrusion.'

'I think that, for some reason, he has welcomed it,' I replied. 'He does not seem to have concerned himself to turn us adrift.'

'What makes you think that?' asked André.

'We are prisoners.'

'No! He has not found out that we are aboard.'

'He has. The horses gave us away.'

'Phew!'

André was silent a moment, then he left my side, and going to the ladder, he ascended the two or three steps, and tried, quietly, to raise the hatch cover. He tried gently at first, then with all his strength; but either way, it refused to budge. He then came back.

'You're right,' he said. 'We're prisoners! What's the next thing to be done?'

'We have to wait somebody's pleasure,' I replied.

So we had, but it was not long ere we had news.

It was now very dark, as the moon had set, and the dawn not yet begun to show itself. There was also no lights to be observed on the vessel, which might have served to cast a little radiance through the very small skylight; but perhaps, as seemed likely, if this were a vessel of dubious character, there would be no desire on the part of her crew to attract attention by the display of any lights.

Deciding, for our part, that there was nothing to be gained by trying to force our way out of the cabin until

the owners wished to invite us to do so, we then lay down again, to get as much rest as we could do, under the circumstances; but, after a time, we heard a voice that seemed to come from some one in the same cabin.

'Messieurs' was gently spoken.

I started, for we had no knowledge that there was anyone but ourselves in that tiny cabin.

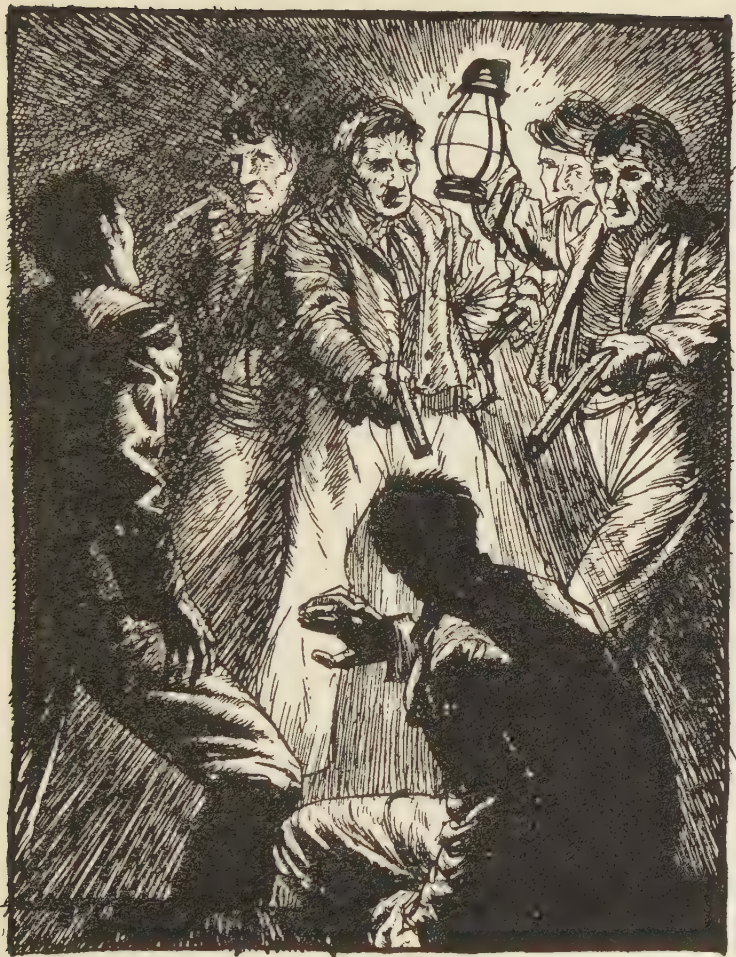
'Messieurs' came again, 'do not attempt to struggle or cry out. You are quite safe, but you will be obliged to be useful to us. Wait till I make a light, and then you will understand.'

I think my friend André was for pitching into the man, whoever he was, out of hand; but I saw no reason for anything of the sort, and I whispered to him to keep his sword out of the way. As for our pistols, with true boyish negligence, we had forgotten to load them. But we soon saw that there was a difficulty in the way of our fighting our way through. The man who had spoken lighted a lantern, and then we saw that there were four men in the little cabin with us, and that each had a pistol pointed in our direction. We were fairly caught.

'Messieurs,' went on the man again, 'we have need of your uniform. You will kindly strip, and hand them over to us. Then you may perhaps depart, when we find an opportunity to allow you to do so at no risk to ourselves. Alonze, kindly bring those other garments down, will you?'

A voice from the deck then said, — 'But why waste the good clothes, monsieur?'

'Oh, come,' said the first man, who seemed much amused, 'our friends may take cold if they have far to



WE SAW THAT THERE WERE FOUR MEN IN THE CABIN

walk without clothing. Pitch those down, like a good fellow.'

Without any more talk the man above did as desired, and our friend told us to get out of our own quickly, and to put these fresh ones on; which, though they were a mile too big for us, were yet better than none at all. So, without any more ado, André and I did as requested.

'There, that is all right!' said the man. 'But, of course, you do not need swords and pistols amongst friends. Kindly place them on the locker.'

André looked at me, with a sidelong glance, on receiving this command. I think he wanted to see if I were inclined to fight it out. However, I saw no advantage in trying it on, especially in this small space, where we had scarcely room to stand together, and were altogether at the mercy of the men who had the pistols ready. So, with a slight groan, he placed his sword and pistol down.

'That is very good,' said the little man, quite agreeably. 'Now, gentlemen, you may go on deck, and look around you, just to assure yourselves as to your present position.'



Chapter 10

ANDRÉ and I 'tumbled up' quite readily. We found, as we had already come to believe would be the case, that we were quite out of sight of land.

'Prisoners!' whispered my friend to me, though not so low but what the little gentleman who had accompanied us caught it.

'For the time, gentlemen,' he said. 'We need to make ourselves safe, of course; but I assure you that you will not be made more uncomfortable than is necessary. If you care to return to your cabin, now, and resume your repose, it is quite at your service.'

'I am afraid my friend and I were rather taking a

liberty in using your yacht for an inn, monsieur,' said my friend. 'But we were hard put to it to find one in a strange place, after midnight. Pray accept our excuses.'

'Oh, that is all right,' he replied with a laugh. 'Indeed, it fell out quite as one could wish. We were enabled to borrow your uniforms for a certain purpose; one which might, indeed, appeal to yourselves, as good Frenchmen. But as there is always a doubt about that in these troublous times, we have to keep the matter dark for the present.'

'And shall we be free to continue our own way, having been of this service?' I asked.

'In a short time, no doubt. A few hours may show. But, in the meantime, the cabin is at your service.'

We took this repetition for a command as much as an invitation, and, with a bow, we accepted.

'Well?' inquired André, as soon as we found ourselves alone.

'Well,' I returned. 'If you feel like any more sleep, we have absolutely nothing to prevent us taking it,' and I stretched myself on the locker again, and showed him my own inclinations by going off without any more talk. My friend did likewise.

We now lay undisturbed for some time, till, indeed, we awoke of our own accord. Then we assembled in council to talk over our situation.

'In the first place,' said André, 'what is the time?'

He took out his watch.

'Of course,' he said, 'owing, perhaps, to the fact that last night failed to take a normal course, I forgot to wind it up. Very well.'

He looked about him. The sun was evidently well

up in the sky, but the cabin skylight being fitted with opaque glass, the rays did not get directly through, except at one point, where there was the slightest crack in the glass.

'This will do,' said my friend, and he accordingly placed himself abaft, and studying the angle made by the ray of sunlight from its position on the cabin floor, and an imaginary verticle line directed to the ceiling, my friend said, 'Ten o'clock.'

Then he put his watch on the floor, with the dial pointing due fore and aft of the vessel, and after a little more study pronounced, 'Course, south by east, as near as a mere sous-lieutenant can make it. Any further news?'

'Our ultimate destination, André?' I asked.

'Quite easy!' he said. 'Let us see; — Our friends are not afraid of coming contact with the British fleet, which lies in this direction; and being "good" Frenchmen, as our little friend insinuated last night, they must be Frenchmen of Royalist sympathies. Now, as they are more likely to have dealings with the Patriots of Corsica than with the English, that suggests a voyage to Bastia, or perhaps, Ajaccio; failing either of these, what do you say to Maddelena Bay, where our very dear friend Nelson is supposed to lurk whilst waiting for one of our fleets to come out, eh?'

'I'm willing! We've got to be, if it suits these fellows to take us there, I fancy.'

'Oh, that will be just as it turns out, my friend. In the meantime, I should like to know the meaning of this stoppage.'

For we could now perceive that the yacht had come

to a standstill. She still rose up and down on the waves however, so it did not seem as though we had reached port. Voices were heard, but not so clearly by ourselves that we could tell the purport of the conversation. I had a fancy, though, that they were using the English tongue rather than our own.

‘Not at all unlikely,’ commented André, when I mentioned my suspicions. ‘We must certainly be in the vicinity of the British fleet; and as I said, our captors do not seem to mind the contact. Can you catch any of their remarks?’

I could not, but I was certain, from the rougher tone of the voices, that it was not French they were speaking.

In a few minutes we were evidently again on our course. But, what was more to the point, our captors, at this point, seemed to bethink themselves that their quarry might have stomachs to be filled, and we were now favoured with a somewhat spare meal which, at any rate, was much better than none at all. We felt, indeed, a good deal better after the experience.

We now had a long day of it, without further stoppages by sea, and after one more meal, and a prolonged interval of rest, we found night descend upon us, still in durance vile. Having no strenuous duties to perform, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in the cabin wherein we had voluntarily incarcerated ourselves; and it was evidently morning again ere we woke with the start that is natural to sailors when they come to an anchorage.

Neither André nor I needed to be told that we had just been moored at the side of some landing stage.

Nor, also, that we were berthed in some river mouth; for we could hear the sound of the water running past our bows, and the absence of any but the slightest rocking motion told us plainly that we were not still at sea.

It was still dark, however, and we were prepared for a further wait before being disturbed by our captors.

But we were mistaken there, for we had not been in this position many minutes before we heard the hatch being opened, and footsteps approaching. Then the quiet, conciliatory voice of the morning before requested us to come forward.

We did so, but getting under the hatch, we found ourselves seized, though not roughly; but our hands were tied behind us, and we were cautioned to make no noise, nor to appeal to anyone whom we might chance to meet. If we did, we should be visited by harsher measures;—very harsh ones, perhaps. We were assured, though, that if we made no attempt to escape, we should meet with no violence. Then we were taken on deck.

Here a cloak was put on our shoulders, with the evident intention of concealing our bonds, and the caution repeated not to appeal to anybody we might meet, and so we went ashore.

Where we were I did not know. It was a town of considerable pretensions; but it was evident to me that I had never set eyes on the place before.

It was still night, and we met nobody about; walking quickly after our leaders; two other men following promptly on our heels.

We appeared to take a winding path, amongst some

houses and larger buildings, but as it appeared to me, not getting any distance from the waterside.

Once as we were together, in a narrow entry, André leant towards me, and whispered the word 'Ajaccio.' He had recognized the place from a former visit, and I felt, with a thrill, that I was now in that same town where my hero Napoleon was born.

Had he been here now I should not have very much minded; but I knew that he had been separated from the land of his birth, from political reasons; and though it was now French ground, there was still a great deal of discontent and intrigue; and there were probably more people in the place who were opposed to French domination, than there were in favour of it. Thus it was not possible to feel that we were quite safe from harm, even in this place.

We were not favoured with any explanation from our captors, as even the very friendly little gentleman did not think fit to accord us one. We moved through the narrow streets very cautiously, every now and then stopping at the turn of one, to peer along the next before we ventured into it; and then quickly, but silently, advancing towards the next. At length, however, we stopped in front of a high building, more like a great warehouse than anything else, and here we were ushered in, and taken to a room that seemed a great way up in the air, and left to ourselves.

My friend was, naturally, the first to speak, and he said, — 'I'm afraid we are causing rather a lot of trouble, Marcel. But the question is, — Why?'

But I couldn't tell him that.

'Well,' he continued, 'I don't see that there's any

reason why we should continue to wear these bonds. I am sure if we stood back to back, I could work yours off.'

We then stood up, as he desired, and with a good deal of trouble, he managed to untie me. Afterwards the task of doing the same to him gave me little trouble, as I was able to see what I was about. Then, chafing our wrists, which had suffered from the tightness of the bonds, we soon began to feel more at ease, and the light growing, were able to look about us.

We now found ourselves in a room, large enough, and not uncomfortable, though indifferently furnished.

It was one which stretched right across the floor of a large building, having windows at both ends; though these were too high above the floor for us to look through them. There was no fireplace, and the walls at either side were of rough wooden planks, though the outer walls were of brick. The floor was of wood also, and bore the marks of a good deal of wear and tear. There were two doors, in either of the party walls, arranged quite unlike the doors of a house, and giving further evidence as to its being a workroom. But the place was high and dry, and being lofty, had a good air, in spite of the flavour of some material, probably leather, which told of its former use as a workroom.

High up where we were, we could hear little of any noise in the street below, but as we had seen there were few about as yet.

'Did the kind gentleman say anything about breakfast?' asked André, who was always ready to get any amusement he could out of the most adverse circumstances.

‘No!’ I answered, I fear, rather crossly. ‘Nor did he favour us with any information as to when our execution was to take place.’

André whistled softly. I thought I had managed to stem the torrent of his witticisms; but I soon found out that it was not possible to effect that miracle.

‘Perhaps neither of those events is destined to take place, Marcel. But the position is interesting. The question to be settled is, – Would it be preferable to have a good meal, and an execution afterwards? Or no execution, and no meal. Shall we discuss the matter in the proper fashion of grave philosophers? We might get a lot of talk out of such an interesting subject as that.’

‘I dare say we might, André. But suppose we defer the subject until we have looked about ourselves a bit? We might find the possibility of getting free without stopping to ask permission of our new friends.’

‘Not a bad idea, in its way; though we should miss the solution of the little problem I had the honour to propound unless we stayed here to watch developments.’

But my friend was not one to let his tongue take the place of more practical considerations, and he fell into my views about examining our prison, more minutely, without loss of time.

We then cautiously tried the four doors in the room, but found they were all secured. Also they were made of such stout materials that there was clearly no chance of our being able to burst through them. The floor did indeed look rather worn, and seemed to suggest that we might be able to loosen a plank or two; but

an effort to do so assured us that such a thing would be almost impossible without the use of some tool which we were not possessed of. There remained only the windows.

These, as I said, were altogether too high up for us to see anything but the sky through them, and this, though offering a cheerful prospect of blue flecked with white clouds here and there, giving promise of a most glorious winter day, was only the more depressing because we had no means of getting out of our prison to enjoy it.

'We shall have to get a peep through those windows,' said André. 'Let us move the table to the wall, and then a chair on the top of it might do the trick.'

We carried the table to the wall, quietly, and then, placing a chair on the top, André got up and managed to get a peep through.

'Not much to be seen, after all,' he said disappointedly. 'You come and have a try.'

I went up, in turn, and made a survey of the scene.

I saw the roofs of many buildings, and beyond them, a vision of glorious hills; but found no great satisfaction in contemplating them as there did not appear to be the slightest chance of our being able to get a nearer view. There was no possibility of our being able to escape by means of the window, as it was not made to open; though probably the height of the window from the ground made it impractical as a means of escape in any case.

'What about the other window?' asked André.

'I don't suppose it will be any different,' I answered,

rather despondently. 'We had better be careful too, or they will hear us moving the table.'

'Oh, that won't matter much. They'll only take the idea that we are rather opposed to stopping here, that's all; and they know that already. We'll be as quiet as we can, though.'

We carted the table across the room, and my friend mounted again. We found there was one favourable difference in this particular, in that it could be opened, in one section, in order to let in the air. It was even higher than the other one though, and did not look as though it might be any advantage to us, as we needed a ladder, and a pretty long one at that, in order to descend on to the ground at the other side of the window.

'Well,' said André, after a thoughtful survey, 'we *could* get out of this, right enough, if only the ground were not so far away. I'm afraid the needs of escaping prisoners were rather overlooked, when the building was designed, Marcel.'

'Very unfortunate,' I agreed, 'but let me come up and have a look. I should like to satisfy my curiosity as to the outside world.'

'Wait a minute,' he replied. 'Lift me up an inch or two. I think I can open the window and climb through.'

I did as requested, and without much trouble, he climbed up, opened the window and clambered through it.'

'This is all right,' he said, looking back at me. 'It gives directly on to the river. Can you get up and have a look?'

I thought I could manage it, and warning him to keep a tight hold, in case I came up too suddenly, I sprang up, and grasping the iron part of the window frame, managed to pull myself up sufficiently to get a clear view of the scene.

Chapter 11

WHAT I saw was a very tempting view of freedom. We appeared to be on the banks of an estuary, in the waters of which rode various small craft, any one of which might be very useful to us, provided we were able to get at them. There were few people about to prevent us helping ourselves, as there was, at that time, very little doing by the waterside anywhere in the neighbourhood of the British fleet.

As far as Corsica was concerned the English always had one eye on it, and often it was actually in their hands.

Just now they were doing a good deal to favour the Corsican Patriots, who were constantly striving to get away from their French masters; even as they had conspired to get away from their Austrian oppressors in the early days of their great countryman, our Napoleon. And perhaps they had found out that they had made a great mistake in getting rid of that brilliant soldier, for he would certainly have made the island into an independent kingdom, sooner or later. However, he was now a good Frenchman, and it was he whose power attached the island of his birth to France, for ever.

‘Well, André,’ I said to my friend, ‘all we need do now is to get down out of this, and take a boat. We might be out of sight of this place before the world is well awake.’

‘You are joking, Marcel. But let me tell you this, old boy, we shall be away from here in less than twenty-four hours.’

‘Do you mean that?’ I asked.

‘Yes!’ he replied. ‘Just hoist yourself up a little more, and cast your eye on that mass of scaffold poles in the corner to the left of this window.’

I lost no time about doing this, and scrambling up, saw a number of very long poles resting against the corner of the wall, divining my friend’s plan easily enough. It was simply to make a jump for them, when we might easily descend to the level of the muddy wharf below. There we should be at liberty, for a time, at all events, and we might choose whether we should take possession of one of the smaller vessels at anchor there, and get away by sea; or find our way to the French authorities, and appeal to their protection against the Corsican Patriots, in whose power we, apparently, were. It only wanted a slice of luck, and we were off.

‘Can we go now?’ I asked eagerly. I wanted to be off, there and then.

André considered. ‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘There’s no time like the present. There are not many people about, and if anyone saw us they might as soon be friends as enemies. These people who have hold of us had to be mighty careful whom they met, as we were coming along. Are you game?’

I was – rather! And in another minute we should, no doubt, have been started on our adventure; but, at that precise moment I heard a noise in the building where we were imprisoned which seemed to warn us that we had better wait, as there seemed to be people stirring around us.

I warned André and got down, followed by my

friend. He seemed rather grumpy about it, but we found that we had barely time to get the table and chair into their proper places, and roughly to tie our bonds again, ere the door was unlocked, and some one entered the room.

The person who entered was a woman, a cheerful-looking, buxom housewife of about thirty years of age. We were both glad to see her, as it seemed to presage something in the way of a breakfast, which was the one thing now which would appear to seal our new-found satisfaction.

She greeted us cheerfully, in a language which was a mixture of Italian and French; and – she bore a tray on which was a plain, but plentiful breakfast.

‘Buono Giorno, signori. Bonjour, messieurs. And how do you like my apartments?’ she said pleasantly.

‘They are very good, madam; especially as our arrival must have been somewhat unlooked-for,’ replied André gravely.

‘Ah non! Ah non! We constantly receive unexpected visitors. We are prepared,’ she said roguishly. ‘And do you stay long?’ she added, with perhaps a touch of raillery.

‘No, madam! We move out to-morrow,’ André replied, with a wink at me.

‘Ah!’ she said again. ‘I understood that you were to be here for a few days. But perhaps you have arranged otherwise.’

We were glad to get this piece of news, as it seemed to give us assurance that we should be able to get clear away from our friends, without trusting to their good nature to let us go, without any damage. They had

not seemed unfriendly, of course, but one never knew to what expedients they might be driven in the course of their business as conspirators, and we could easily understand that we should be much safer out of their vicinity.

‘But here is your breakfast,’ the woman continued, laying the tray on the table. ‘The shops are not open yet, or I might have done better for my guests. However, at dinner – ’ and she waved her hand, as though to indicate the entertainment we might expect at our next meal.

‘I am afraid we shall not be able to take advantage of the good things, madam, unless we are untied,’ said my friend, and he shook himself as though he was unable to get rid of his bonds.

‘Oh, la la! What a matter for my friends to leave you thus. They might have untied you, at the least, as you could not get away from here unless you could fly.’

Then she was good enough to untie the ropes that we professed were securing us, though she laughed when she saw them, saying that a babe could have undone such fastenings, if only one had tried.

‘We have tried, madam,’ said André. ‘Indeed, it is only your timely arrival that prevented us from being free already. See!’ and he pulled his hands free, and showed them to her, making a pretence to rub his hands and wrists, in order to circulate the blood again, after the constraint of the ropes. But, indeed, the marks that had been produced by the original bonds were still on both our wrists.

‘Oh! What nonsense!’ she exclaimed, as she very

kindly chafed my wrists for me. 'But I will rebuke those rough men for their nonsensical binding of you so tightly. That I will!'

'If you would not mind taking a good stout stick to them,' said André, suavely, 'whilst we eat this excellent breakfast, my friend and I would be ever your esteemed servants.'

The woman seemed a good deal struck with my friend's smooth tongue, and she even said that she would see if we could not be accommodated with a better room, of which there were plenty in the building; but at this we were both rather taken aback. This room did, at any rate, offer us a definite way of escape, whilst another might be less fortunately placed. I winked at André as a hint to make himself less agreeable; though, by the looks of him, he did not need my caution. His brain was almost as ready as his long tongue.

'Ah! Perhaps we are better as we are,' he said, with a most languishing look on his face. 'As it is we may be able to enjoy a talk with mademoiselle; but if we were removed, we might have less privacy. Eh, mademoiselle?'

The woman appeared much flattered.

'I will make your apartment more comfortable, then. That will be better,' and leaving us for a short time, she soon reappeared, carrying a good thick rug, together with two more comfortable chairs; whilst a third journey resulted in a bottle of light wine and some choice fruit.

'There,' she said, with a smile, 'I go now to see if any of the shops are open. But I will come again, in

perhaps an hour, and then I will sweep your apartment,' and, escorted to the door by the ever-attentive André, who, however, took advantage of the opportunity to look what might be on the other side of it, she withdrew.

My friend came back.

'Nothing much to see there,' he said. 'Just a long, dark corridor, with a few doors leading off into different bedrooms I suspect. They may probably be the rooms where our companions of the last two days are making up for lost time. So we shall need to be silent if we do anything just now. I still favour getting away by dark hour, however, but after a small meal we will just have another reconnoitre of the position on the other side of the window. Eh?'

My friend was a chatterbox, right enough, but I knew I could trust him to take the most practical steps towards getting us both out of our doubtful position, so I readily adopted his suggestion.

Then, as soon as we could finish our meal, we put the table in position again, and had a more detailed inspection of the scene of the proposed adventure.

We decided that it was entirely practical, and must, therefore, on no account be missed.

Having settled which important matter, we put the table back, and awaited with what patience we could muster for the day to wear itself out.



Chapter 12

THE day did come to an end, eventually, though I think it was about the longest one I have ever experienced.

We saw our pleasant-tempered jailer once or twice, and each time she sat with us, talking agreeably, paying, I must say, a good deal more attention to what my friend André had to remark than what fell from myself. However, except for the break in the monotony she afforded, and an additional speculation as to a possible means of escape, I had little interest in her for my own part. André, of course, was just suited with an appreciative audience for his light talk. In her absence however we decided that we could hardly look to her to

assist us in our nefarious designs of escaping from her friends; which meant that we had to get away by the window, or not at all.

There was no doubt about her favour in other ways, however, and we were regaled with the most excellent meats at dinner, and had a supper further along which removed all need of our care to provide ourselves with the food we might have needed during the first hours of our escape.

Early in the afternoon, also, we had another look at the scene of our proposed exploit during the coming night, familiarizing ourselves with the idea; though, of course, we could not rehearse it as we should have preferred, as once quit of the window-ledge we should be quite unable to get back to it. We should have to go on then, wherever it led.

‘It will be all right,’ said André. ‘The moon will be shining exactly on the poles, at about twelve o’clock, and all we need is to get our legs well over the poles, and hold on like grim death.’

‘I’m ready,’ I replied, though to tell you the truth the idea looked a little less enticing the nearer we got to it.

Early in the afternoon we heard sounds of other people on the premises, and thought we might expect a visit from some of those whom we had been in the company of on our voyage; however, nothing came of it. They were evidently well satisfied that we could make no attempt to escape, and therefore had no need to bother themselves about us. This did not trouble us, however, and we simply listened attentively, tracing the noises on their way towards the apartments below, and so on, out of the building.

At night there were other noises, conspicuously some merry-making that went on on the floor below us. This got rather uproarious towards the time that we were anxious to be on the move out, and we began to fear that the revellers would be stirring rather later than would be quite convenient. But this too gave way to silence, at about half-past eleven, and it was evident that things had begun to be favourable for us as the men who had been enjoying themselves so noisily would be likely to sleep heavily after it.

In another hour, then, after giving our friends time to get well under weigh, we placed the table and chair under the window, and got everything fixed for the attempt.

The moon was now not far from the full, and it shone with great brilliance on the top portion of the poles which we were about to trust our lives to, though an intervening building prevented the illumination of the bottom portion. But this was rather an advantage, for if we could have seen clear to the ground, we might have felt some qualms about the venture.

All being quiet, André and I sat together on the window-ledge, contemplating the task.

‘Shall we jump, or swing?’ asked my friend.

‘Jump,’ I answered. ‘We have a bigger distance to fall, but shall be face to face with the task, and know exactly how far we are to drop.’

‘Jump it is! Well, here goes. Au revoir, Marcel, and don’t forget to follow,’ and without a moment’s hesitation he jumped out towards the poles, grasping them as he fell, and only slipping a foot or two ere he had a firm grip on them.

'It's quite easy,' he called out softly. 'The only thing is the splinters. But we shall have time to extract them when we get down. Wait a minute, though.'

Here he spent a little time looking about him from the point of vantage he had attained.

'All right,' he whispered. 'Not a soul about. Come along.'

'Go down a bit first,' I said. 'I want more room to drop.'

'All right,' he said, and down he went leaving a place clear for me.

I cannot say that I properly appreciated the privilege of dropping down into the darkness, with the possibility of slipping before I got my legs fairly round the poles; however, I was not going to shirk the job which André had demonstrated the practicability of, and in a few seconds I was with my friend, having accomplished the first move, at any rate, towards safety.

'All well?' asked André from below me.

'All well!' I replied. Then we began to slip cautiously down.

Now I know that the proper thing to say here is that when we had just got to terra firma, a door opened unexpectedly, at the bottom of the building, and there issued forth a swarm of enemies who had been awaiting our arrival to take us prisoners again. But truth to tell nothing of the sort occurred. Once we were at the bottom of that fearsome length of timber (and woe-fully high it looked, viewed from the bottom), we found no impediment to our going wherever we chose. The only question was – Where?

'Let's get out of sight of this, first,' suggested André,

and I agreed that that was the first thing to attend to.

Accordingly we crept silently away, and without leaving the vicinity of the waterside, we got round to where a number of small boats lay at anchor, and one of them seemed familiar.

'That's the one that brought us here,' said André.

'Yes,' I answered. 'Don't you think we had better get off with her, right away?'

'That's another matter,' he replied. 'How about the British fleet that stopped us on our way here? They let us pass, for sufficient reasons of their own, but it would be another matter if they came across us on the return journey, and found we were not the same persons in charge of her. What do you think?'

'If we came across them,' I replied.

'Eh! Don't you think we should be bound to be seen, on a night like this? See how light it is.'

'I rather think that might be our defence,' I answered. 'If we were careful to pass any ship to leeward, we could hardly be made out at all, with that small yellow body, and the white sails. We should pass over the seas like a ghost.'

André did not see the force of this, though I could not help thinking to myself that it was my idea, and not his. But, of course, I was some years younger than he, and that accounted for a good deal.

In the end I had to abandon myself to his leadership, and he decided that the best and the only thing that we could do was to lie low till the morning, and then, when there were plenty of people about, we might venture to show ourselves and ask for directions

to the town authorities, whose protection we might, it was to be presumed, rely on.

'We had better not try to get too far by this light,' said André. 'We should, at any rate, be more likely to find evil-doers about, than well-conducted persons. Do you mind rats?'

'Not a bit. I've eaten them,' I replied.

'Well, we shall find some in this old warehouse. But so long as you don't mind, here goes.'

At that moment we were standing just under a great building that looked deserted enough for our purpose. The door was securely closed against us, but that was no obstacle, for hanging down from the second story was a rope suspended from a windlass high up in the air, whilst on the floor just above us was a door, the upper half of which stood open, giving a chance to any poor wanderers like ourselves to get inside. André gave a spring, and grasping the ends of the rope, he skilfully drew himself up until he had got to the door. Then it was my turn.

I don't think I could have accomplished the same feat; but it was not necessary, for André was able to hoist me up like so much hay, and in another minute I stood beside him. Then, carefully bringing the ends of the rope after us, and knotting them to prevent their reaching the ground, to be used by any ill-disposed persons, we felt secure, for the time at any rate.

'There,' said André, with a sigh of satisfaction, 'that's all right. Now let us get a few hours' snooze. Then we will be away early in the morning and have a look round. We are bound to find some one willing to direct us to the Commandant's.'

'Right you are! But haven't you noticed what a pretty pair of scamps we shall look, to inquire our way to the notabilities of the town. You look a precious scamp, in that costume, and I don't suppose I look anything but a very complete villain in my borrowed plumes.'

'Oh! we won't worry about such details. Get to sleep, and don't bother,' and having found some straw, rather aged and dirty it must be said, my friend was soon asleep, I following such a good example without loss of time.

A short time later, — a very short time, it appeared to me, I was aroused by André, who shook me until I was in a condition to ask him what was the matter now.

'Keep silent,' he whispered. 'I think I hear some one.'

I helped him preserve the silence for a time, when I thought I heard voices.

'There's some one else here, besides us,' I whispered.

André touched me again; then leaving me, he crept stealthily across the floor, on his hands and knees, to the further corner of the big loft, where he stopped, and looking down some hole, he beckoned me to join him. I did so, and saw an unexpected and unwelcome sight.

On the floor below ours were similar heaps of straw, and lying on them, some three or four other men, who did not present the aspect of desirable fellow-lodgers. They were rough and ragged persons, with a touch of finery in their dirty costumes that seemed to differentiate them from the ordinary class of workmen. There were also the remains of a meal scattered about

the floor, and amongst these remains, some articles of jewellery that seemed strangely associated with them.

Two of the fellows seemed to be asleep, but two others were awake and these were looking up at yet another, who, on his feet, was looking down at them as though he had just roused them up.

'Well!' inquired this man of one of those who was lying down.

'Well!' was the reply.

'And why did you fellows choose to shut me out again. Do you expect me to crawl up the walls like a fly?'

'Eh! What do you mean? Nobody shut you out, Gil!'

'That's a lie!'

'Now! Now! Keep your lies to yourself, Gil! We are all good men here, and you are not to talk of lying. Keep your mouth shut, I tell you.'

'No! I tell you I will not stand this sort of thing. You did the same thing one day last week, or one of you did.'

'Ah! That was true, last week, but it was an accident, Gil. We understood you to say you would be away all night. But to-night, – No! the rope was as usual.'

'It's a lie, I tell you!' said the man passionately.

His words now roused up the other two men, and all stood together.

'What is this about the rope?' inquired one.

'Gil says it was not in its place ready for him to ascend,' was the reply.

'But it was,' said another. 'I saw to it myself.'

'I tell you it was not. It was drawn up, and it was

knotted, too, so that it could not slip down, by any means,' continued the man Gil, who seemed determined to pursue his quarrel to the bitter end.

'I deny it!' replied the other emphatically. 'It was all in order. I saw to it myself, I – Antoine Dupres. I swear it!' and I could see the man cross himself as he did so.

'You – Antoine Dupres – you would swear anything, by any saint. I tell you, you lie! You shall come and see for yourself, and then you shall account to me for it. The rope was drawn up, and I had to scramble up by a pole, as well as I could, and I came near to breaking my neck. But I will break yours, Antoine Dupres.'

The other men looked at one another at this. They seemed to think that there was something in their mate's words that wanted an explanation.

'The rope knotted, and drawn up?' said yet another. 'Then if it is so, we can see it for ourselves.'

'Yes,' commented one, who had not yet opened his mouth. 'And if it is so, the man who did it must be in this building with us. We must see that, too.'

This had suddenly become alarming. I looked at André, who was immediately on the *qui vive*.

As I have said, my friend, for all he was a chatter-box, was a dependable young fellow in a crisis, and he was ready, as usual. Pointing to the exit, he moved across the floor swiftly but silently.

Then, whilst our friends below were evidently taking a few seconds to think out the problem, we gained the door and saw the pole mentioned by Gil resting against it. André pointed to this without a word, and

for the second time that night, I found myself sliding down a pole to a place of safety.

I expected to see André following me without loss of time; but, looking up, saw he was coolly engaged in untying the rope.

‘Be quick, André,’ I whispered.

‘All serene!’ he returned, and then, before he took to the pole, he finished what he was about, and giving the hawser a strong jerk, which had the effect of freeing it from the windlass, he and the rope got to the ground together. Then lowering the pole to the ground he said he was ready to depart wherever I had the goodness to lead him.

‘They’re boxed up all right, and it will take them a few minutes to get away. In the meantime, come on,’ and without further words, he took to his heels, I following.

‘Where next, old man?’ I inquired, as soon as we came to a pause.

‘Don’t know,’ he replied. We then stopped to look about us, but he soon decided on a further course.

‘Rats keep to the waterside,’ he said, ‘and I think we had better imitate them. Don’t you wish you had never done wrong, and been compelled to run away from your friends, Marcel,’ he inquired comically. ‘Every man’s hand is against us poor prodigals.’

‘We shall have to take to the sea,’ I said insinuatingly.

‘Oh, go along with you! I want a night’s rest, somewhere.’

We still had another unexpected adventure before we found a prospect of lodgings, however; for, while

we were diligently seeking a likely spot amongst some buildings that had the appearance of offices, we came across a figure that seemed to be on the same quest.

'What's this chap about, André,' I asked, catching sight of the lurking figure.

We watched together, for a few minutes, seeing a smallish, ragged figure making his way about almost as we ourselves were doing; going quietly up to a door, and trying it, to see if, by any chance, it were undone.

He had tried several doors as he came down the street towards where we stood in the shadow of a tall building, going along quite methodically.

'A watchman, perhaps,' suggested André; but it did not appear so, for as he got near us, he did find one door that was, apparently, insecurely fastened; he opened it a few inches, and then, after looking furtively about for a few minutes, he opened it still further, and went quietly in.

'Now what do we do?' I asked my resourceful friend.

'Humph! I don't quite know,' he replied. 'I wish we could meet an honest man, for a change. We seem to be moving in an atmosphere of rascality. At the same time, it hardly becomes us to be arresting anybody. I think we shall have to let him go. But he must come out of that. We can't countenance any such goings-on, at any rate, not when they seem so little likely to be profitable to ourselves. Come on, Marcel,' with which he pulled me towards the building where we had seen the man enter.

'Come out o' this!' he commanded as soon as we were abreast of the wooden office building, and before he had time to realize that his words were heard, the

fellow, whoever he was, bounded out of the place and made off at a pace which we should have been hard put to to follow, in a strange town, whose turnings and twistings were unknown to us.

We stood looking after him until he had turned the corner, and then turned to consider our own business.

I left the leadership to André, and he, after sniffing the air a bit, said, – ‘Marcel, this place smells warm. They must have had a fire in it during the day. It wouldn’t be half a bad idea to sit in it for a time. It’s rather cold outside.’

‘Do we sleep, captain?’ I asked.

‘We do. It won’t be any harm, not so long as we awake before an offended proprietor turns up.’

‘Very well,’ I answered lightly, thinking that I, at any rate, would be able to wake up at an early hour.

Somehow or other, however, I failed to do so. As for my friend, I did not expect it of him, and next morning, at what seemed to me an uncommonly early hour, we were both awakened by the efforts of some persons unknown, who seemed unable to find their way in. For an additional security, I must explain, we had taken the precaution to fasten the door from the inside, so that a key was useless in the case.

‘Well, stupid, you’ve done it now. You must have broken the lock,’ were the words we heard on awakening.

André and I looked at one another, rather dismayed.

‘I guess *we’ve* done it, anyway,’ commented my friend, always the first to give voice to his sentiments. ‘Now what sort of apology can we make for our intrusion?’

'How would it be to tell the truth, André?' I asked.

'Well, if you can't think of anything more likely to be believed, perhaps we had better try it. Here goes,' with which he opened the door, and invited the proprietor to enter.

'Humph!' said this individual when we had finished telling him of the adventure which led to our partly-innocent occupation of his premises.

He looked us up and down, noting the extremely ragged appearance, but winding up with a more minute examination of our faces, which fortunately, happened to be fairly clean. 'Perhaps it may be as you say, young gentlemen. But for the sake of precaution, I must ask you to come along with me to the Commandant's. One has to be careful these times.'

This we had not the slightest objection to do, especially as it had been our own idea to find our way to the same official, as soon as we were able to. Accordingly the gentleman, who was connected with the shipping interests, having business between Marseilles, Corsica, and many of the Mediterranean ports, as well as, when it was practicable, with the West Indies, took us along with him.

He left the clerk, whose negligence had been the cause of our occupying his premises, behind him; but another individual seemed to spring up from nowhere, in order, it would appear, to see to it that we really did land at our destination; and in a very short time, we found ourselves in the presence of a stern, elderly man, who, though in plain clothes, seemed to have 'soldier' written all over him.

This gentleman examined us with the most minute

care, from which it was evident that he found a great deal to do with questionable characters. However, in the end we seemed able to convince him of our *bona fides*, and he said that it appeared to him that it was his duty to see that we got safely to the mainland again; though, unfortunately, that was just the thing that was most difficult under the present circumstances.

‘I am afraid,’ he said, ‘that things are rather against you continuing your very interesting series of adventures just yet, as we have no warships in our neighbourhood except those that we should be much better without. The only thing I can think of is to get Monsieur Jehan, whose offices have already been useful to you, to take an interest in your case. Perhaps he may succeed in getting you away in one of his own vessels, if he has any venture ready to depart. Eh, monsieur?’

‘It is difficult, as monsieur the Commandant says, but it is not impossible. We do succeed in getting a ship past our numerous enemies at times, and I think it time that we were able to effect another stroke that way. One of our difficulties is to obtain a sufficient supply of sailors, but if our young friends would not mind serving in that capacity, by way of a change, it would help towards the problem.’

Needless to say, André and I jumped at this offer.

Being then at liberty to depart, we went away with our new friend to his office, where, whilst he was in consultation with his clerk, in respect to our business, we were regaled with a substantial meal.

This merchant was in a big way in the shipping of this port, and of various others. His head-quarters was Marseilles, but because of an unfortunate event, he

had been unable to return there on his last voyage; mainly owing, of course, to the attentions of the British fleet, which was always to be found in the vicinity of the island, and which, not infrequently would, with the greatest effrontery, put into the very ports.

This made it difficult for our friend to get about to his various branches; as, quite recently, he had barely escaped capture; and if that had happened, his business, already greatly jeopardized by the difficulties of his position, might have been completely destroyed.

To avoid this he had had to trust a good deal to messengers. But this led to great losses in other ways, for it is a sad fact that there were many around him who were ready to take advantage of his position in order to do the best they could for themselves; meaning, of course, that their unfortunate employer could sink, or swim, whichever way it happened.

All were not of this character, of course, as times like these, giving men more liberty to choose for themselves, they showed themselves in their own proper colours; and many men who would have passed almost unregarded under a normal course of events, now came out to the front, and showed up very well indeed. But such men were not always to be found, and Monsieur Jehan had suffered a good deal from the depredation of the other class of person; and he was now hard put to it to find men who could be trusted to carry out his more delicate operations.

At this juncture it occurred to him that André and I were, perhaps, as likely fellows as he well could meet; for he had been well pleased at our frankness over the matter of our intrusion into his offices; which had, in-

deed, prevented the loss of some valuable papers by our ejection of the other uninvited guest. For in our absence at the Commandant's, his clerks had gone over the place, and found that all was in order. So that, by the time that we got back to the office, our friend had made up his mind that we were to be trusted.

After a meal such as prodigals like André and myself were able to do strict justice to, M. Jehan took us to a clothier's shop where we found some ready-made uniforms not exactly of the pattern then used in the Republican Navy, yet sufficiently like to show us as naval officers. And being further reassured by the sight of us in them that we were what we claimed to be, he next took us to his house, spending a good deal of time with us, talking of our adventures, and giving us entertainment in return.

Then, after learning that some of André's family connections were men of standing whose names were not unknown to himself, M. Jehan seemed to think that he had sufficiently made our acquaintance to trust us with a little of his own private business. He explained his situation to us, asking if we were willing to assist him by taking charge of some valuable memoranda for the behoof of his partner in Marseilles.

He had been so little inclined to trust the messages to paper, for they were mostly matters related to the movements of his various vessels, and, consequently, just the sort of information that it was desirable to keep from falling into the hands of any British captain – and he asked if we could commit them to memory, both of us, so that if it chanced that one of us was not

in a position to finish the journey, the other might still do so, and complete the business.

This we were very ready to undertake, and we immediately set to work to learn these lessons, – the Young Man's Guide to Business – André styled it, for there was so much of it that we felt that we had been back to school before it was finished, and M. Jehan had declared himself satisfied. And after that it but remained for some opportunity to be found for getting one of his vessels out of port for us to commence our voyage to Marseilles, where the head-quarters of his business was.



Chapter 13

MY friend André was, as I have had occasion to say, more than once, something of a chatterbox, and was of a rather reckless disposition; yet he had a turn for thoughtfulness which came to the surface ever and anon, showing another side of him; and, during the time of waiting for our voyage to commence I was not surprised that he should broach a subject concerning our own surprising adventures that I had managed to overlook utterly.

‘Do you know, Marcel,’ he said, ‘I have been thinking that it’s mighty strange that neither the Commandant nor our friend Monsieur Jehan should have thought it worth while to inquire of us as to the individuals who took the trouble to import us here. They must be plotters of some kind; but why should not the men in authority have need to know anything about them?’

‘Well, to tell you the truth, André, I have never given the fellows a moment’s thought. I’ve been quite satisfied to get away from them. But you are right in thinking that there’s something queer about it. Are they afraid of meeting some of their own friends, do you think? One never knows who is of any party, nowadays.’

‘No! There’s so many changes. Well, all we can do, I think, is to look after our own interests. We seem pretty safe as long as we keep indoors. I never had a real good view of any of those men, except the little fellow who was so much too polite. Did you?’

‘No! I’m sure that I couldn’t swear to any but that one.’

‘Well, we may have met them in the streets, for anything we know. We’ll keep our eyes open while we are here.’

We did so, and having our interest aroused, we even made little voyages of discovery into the streets, to see if we could spot any of our friends, but without result. We knew but the one of them, whom we did not catch sight of, and if we chanced upon any of the others they showed no sign that we could detect.

However, we had little leisure to put in to the work of discovering who our captors had been, for in a day or two M. Jehan had a message from somewhere or other, which put him on the alert.

We were now compelled to keep ready aboard the ship that was to convey us to Marseilles (perhaps), as it looked as though a favourable moment had arrived for our departure. The message our friend had received was to the effect that the British fleet had recently assembled in such numbers, at Malta, that it seemed very unlikely that they had many vessels at liberty for scouting purposes in any other part of the Mediterranean.

This was a chance not to be missed, and we were not surprised to find everybody beginning to show the greatest activity.

As a matter of caution a scout was sent out in order to test the question as to whether there were any of the enemy still in the neighbourhood; but the report being favourable, and our own vessel having followed the smaller one to the limits of the bay, in order to lose no time, as soon as the report was received we instantly made for the open water.

M. Jehan was aboard us, the boat that was to take him ashore again being allowed to trail astern. Our good friend was anxious to know that we had got clear away, and he meant to leave only at the last possible moment.

In spite of our importance as naval officers, and also as messengers of the house of Jehan et Cie, André and I were more than willing to lend a hand to the ropes, taking a part as common seaman. This prevented us from noticing one item of news that seemed to us rather significant when, at last, we saw it.

Presently however, André, who had been looking around after a slight lull in the work, said to me, — ‘Marcel, do you see that fancy-looking yacht out in the bay? It looks familiar to me. Do you know it?’

As soon as my attention was drawn to it, I recognized it as the one that had brought us to Ajaccio. This was André’s conviction, also.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘it can’t do us any harm here, as far as I can see, but I wonder if it has any reference to us at all. I noticed it was standing out, just as we prepared to cast off.’

The yacht had put out to sea, and being a quick sailer, had had, at first, the heels of us, and was nearing the horizon ere we were well clear of the bay.

I felt no more fear of her than did my friend André, but I thought that it could do no harm if our friend and owner, M. Jehan, were to be made acquainted with the coincidence; accordingly we made our way to him.

He came forward with us to examine the vessel, the captain with him.

‘I know that little vessel,’ said this latter. ‘It is the

private yacht of Signor Marini, a landowner whom you must have heard of, M. Jehan. He does not concern himself with politics. At least, it is thought not.'

'At the same time he brings messages from the mainland to the Governor and the Commandant,' said our friend thoughtfully. 'How is that done, captain?'

'Ah, that I can't say, sir,' he replied. 'But the yacht is a very fast one, and is skilfully handled by a man who ought to be in a more serious business than merely conveying a rich landowner about the seas, in these troublous times.'

'But how is it she is able to get so easily between here and France?' asked M. Jehan.

'Her speed, sir,' replied the captain. 'They call her the ghostship, round about the bay. She turns up in all sorts of unexpected places, and quite suddenly, as though she had just dropped down from the skies.'

M. Jehan thought over the matter with a puzzled frown on his face.

'I don't like it,' he said.

'If you think her sailing has any reference to us, sir, I can put back, and test it,' said the captain.

We had informed him of our suspicion that we had been actually stopped on our way to the island, and afterwards allowed to proceed; and this increased the disquietude of our friend; but he was very unwilling to interrupt our voyage, unless absolutely compelled. So he contented himself with the request that the captain would alter our course a little, so that the yacht would reap little benefit by communicating with any vessels to the north of us, if such were her owner's intentions.

This took us towards the south, and M. Jehan was able to stay with us for a good hour or two, during which time it was evident from the cautious shaping of the yacht's course that her commander was determined not to get too far away from all sight of us. Then M. Jehan, having at last to depart, did so; informing our captain that he would certainly make a point of inquiring, in the town, as to the pursuits of the Signor Marini who had seemed to betray such interest in the movements of vessels. If he were not satisfied, he would call the attention of the authorities to his proceedings.

This was satisfactory so far, but it did not entirely relieve us as to our own position.

There was always the possibility that the yacht might be concerning herself with André and myself, more than with anyone else on board; but, being gifted with a good deal of self-confidence, we did not bother ourselves much about it. We thought that all would come right in the end. As for the captain, as soon as the owner had left the vessel, he paid little heed to the movements of the yacht, and after holding on his course for an hour or so, he veered again, and made for the course, north-north-west, with the wind in a favourable position on the vessel's quarter, the same as he had set on on our first emerging from the bay.

Then the yacht seemed satisfied, for she also turned, and as far as we could see, made for Ajaccio again. After which, we thought no more of her.

André and I both took a watch, he the first part of the following night, and I the second.

Having spent so large a part of my life in sight of that fleet which was always doing such damage to my

poor France, and which had come near to taking possession of my native town, I was always uneasy about it, and all through the present voyage I could not shake off the fear that we were destined to run up against our redoubtable enemies. And not less so because they had been discovered to be well out of the way.

It did not seem natural to me that we were not flying before the face of these people, who seemed verily to live the life of fishes, and to be more at home on the water than they were on the land. So during my watch I determined that nothing should take my attention from the seas where I, at every minute, expected to see start up, as if from the bottom of the ocean, the ghostly outline of a war vessel, with its thundering request to us to stop our ship, and give an account of ourselves.

I saw nothing, however; and, of course, I said nothing of my fears for fear they should take me for a scared land-lubber. And when my watch was ended, I went below with the rest, and sought what sleep I might expect to get, in the face of my fears.

Nor did the next four hours, either, bring us any news of our enemies; and when I was roused out for another spell, it was near enough to daylight to give me some hope that all was to be well on this particular voyage.

Before I was well above hatches, however, I heard a summons of 'All hands on deck,' and springing alertly up the remaining steps, I ran to the side, and, looking over the northern horizon, I saw the outline of a couple of vessels standing towards us, under all sail, and bowling merrily along before a breeze that gave us

warning of an encounter with them at no great distance of time.

‘English!’ I shouted, as soon as I saw them; for, with my experience of them, I knew as well as the most sailorly man on board the rig and bearing of the British ships of war.

The captain called me to him.

‘There’s no mistake about it, is there?’ he asked.

‘None at all, sir. I know these ships too well.’

He accepted my decision with a nod, and looking about him, at the sky and the sea, said there was nothing for it but to try and show the enemy a clean pair of heels. Fortunately, as he said, we had a reputation for fast sailing, and might make good our escape; if so be we were not unfortunate enough to run up against another enemy ship on our course.

The ship was now put about, and we began a stern, long drive before our enemies. For the first part of the time, indeed, we seemed likely to outsail them, for we certainly drew away. But after a time the wind freshened, and then they began to have the advantage of their greater spread of canvas.

For an hour or two thereafter we had an exciting time, and as it went on I had visions of another spell of imprisonment; but this time in an English prison, with perhaps a prospect of a longer term of imprisonment, and less possibility of getting away from it, than had been the case at Ajaccio. But the race was not over immediately; for the wind was destined to play us strange tricks that morning; first giving us hopes of deliverance, to take them away again, in an hour or two, by blowing at a rate that gave our enemies the



WE LOST OUR FOREMAST

advantage once more. Withal, it was a quite unexpected catastrophe that finally put us out of the race.

At about ten in the morning it was all in favour of our enemies. Then the wind veered a little, and blew, with a lighter air, on our bows, and for about three hours we had the advantage. Then again it was the turn of the English ships; and so on, until it seemed to us that fate was a little unfair.

Towards dusk we were in a fairly good position. We had the enemy hull down, on the horizon, and it seemed likely that, did the wind hold as it was then, we should be able to elude them altogether in the darkness. But at one moment, when the wind had certainly begun to freshen again, but was yet blowing with no great strength, there was heard a strange and ominous cracking sound, and in a little while what was our extreme surprise to see our new foremast bend forward, and with another rending sound, topple over the side.

It was a dire misfortune, and seemed all the more disastrous from the impossibility of anticipating it. We were certainly well supplied with canvas, for a small vessel. She was schooner-rigged, with square fore-top sails. But the mast had only been stepped for this voyage.

The captain, who was standing near me, seemed as if stricken dumb at this mischance.

He laid his hand on my shoulder, as if to keep himself upright, and I heard him first begin to swear in the ready way in which seamen are apt to indulge themselves, quite uselessly to my thinking, and then as if struck too deeply for this, he changed, and said, in a

solemn voice, — 'From this moment I believe in a God. There was no reason for this! None!' and he reeled a little, so that I had to support him.

He recovered himself in a very short time, but, still with the hoarse tone of one who has been almost stricken past the power of speech, he gave orders for the wreck of the mast and rigging to be cleared away. Then, with more forethought, he went to look at our pursuers, to see if, perchance, they had been left too far astern for them to perceive the accident.

They were now so far away that we could see little of them but their topmasts. We could not therefore determine whether or not they saw us, but it looked as though they were still keeping up the pursuit. And if that were the case it could not be very long before they got near enough to observe our plight.

Our men quickly cut away the wreckage that was hampering our movements, and we got a little way on the vessel again, though with small hopes of getting away altogether. It was only the instinct to do what we could in order to keep our freedom. However, at this moment, I had the idea to seek my friend André, whom I had not caught sight of during the excitement.

I ran over the decks in the endeavour to find him, and called his name, but without receiving any answer.

Hearing me, one of the deck hands suddenly exclaimed, 'Mon Dieu, but the poor young man was half-way up the shrouds when the mast gave way. He must have gone with it.'

With a bound I reached the side of the vessel, and looked over. There was no one to be seen anywhere, but, of course, the mast and sails was a jumbled col-

lection of wreckage, over which the waves were breaking, and we were leaving it to leeward as fast as our remaining mast could take us.

It was getting dusk, too, and seeing there was no time to be lost, I told the deck hand what I was about to do, and slipped over the side, and began to swim in the direction of the wreckage.

I could always swim, like a fish, and I had never had any sense of danger in connection with the water; and, at any rate, I did not believe that our vessel could get away from us very quickly as, owing to the loss of all her foreward sails, she would be very difficult to steer. So, thinking that I could reach the spot where my poor friend must be, and be within hail of the vessel, I made my way thither without much thought of the possibilities.

As I went on, I thought I saw André clinging to the mast, just a little lower than the foretop; but when I reached there, I found I had been deceived by the shape of the wreckage. However, I soon found him where he was hidden under the canvas of the forecourse, which had come, almost bodily away from the boom, and here he was, clinging for dear life to the mast.

His face was pale, and he did not seem able to move. I saw that he must be hurt, and touching him, asked him how he fared.

His ready tongue was useless to him just now, and he could only move his head forlornly, and seemed to be on the point of fainting. Then his eyes opened again, and he whispered the word 'ribs,' and closed them again.

He seemed to have a difficulty in breathing, too, and I divined that he had broken a rib and was, perhaps, feeling the pressure of it inside his chest. So, hoisting myself on to the mast, I got a length of rope, and taking a turn or two round his body, I secured him for the time being, and then set to making a further examination of the situation we were in.

The mass of canvas on the broken mast was sufficient to keep the water around us fairly still, so that, though the waves were a pretty good height, they did not disturb us, and my poor friend was safe for the time being. However, he might be badly damaged, and I was anxious that our people should pick us up with as little delay as possible. So I got on my feet and looked around.

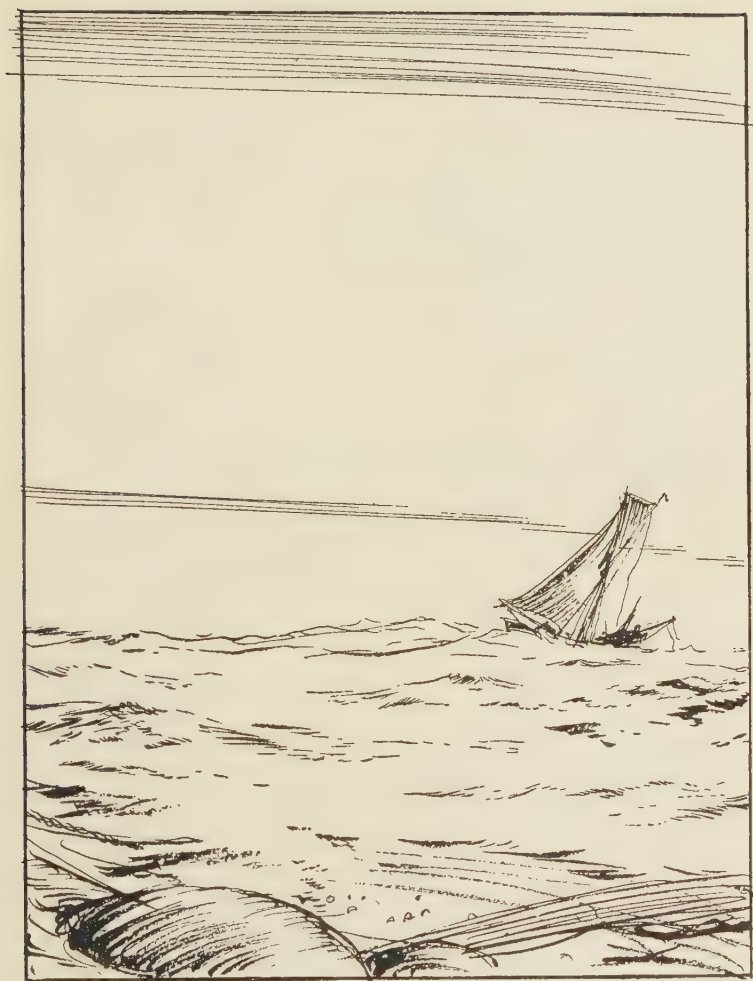
Our schooner was but a little way from us, though, under the pressure of her remaining canvas, she was drifting further away, each moment. I called to them, and felt that they could not but hear me. However, there was no sign from them that they did so.

In a short time I was convinced that either my voice was unheard, or else the men in the ship were thinking more of their own safety than mine, or my poor friend's; and as time went on I began to fear that we had been abandoned to the mercy of the waves.

I have never learnt, indeed, what was the reason of our being deserted. Whether the man I had told of my intention to take to the water had really heard me or not, or whether he had taken care not to let the captain know of our position, from a selfish fear that if they did stay round that spot they must inevitably be taken by the enemy. For the captain, I was sure,



OUR SCHOONER WAS BUT A LITTLE WAY FROM US,



THOUGH SHE WAS DRIFTING AWAY EACH MOMENT

would have made some effort to rescue us from our terrible position; for he was not a hard man, as sailors go; and besides, he had just had some sort of shock, through the apparently-causeless falling of the foremast; and it had seemed to have minded him of the position in which all men stand in relation to the Eternities. I am convinced, therefore, that he would not have dared, at that moment, to have left us in such a terrible position, had he known of it; however, there was the ship standing on her course, and there were André and I, alone on the wild sea; and one of us hurt to the extent that made any hope of rescue seem very frail.

I shouted as long as I could hope to be heard, and continued to stand upright on the mast, long after my voice could have carried across the space that was fast increasing; but when it proved to no purpose, I sank down beside my friend again, and turned all my attention to his needs.

I slipped into the water again, so that I could bring my face close to his, and hear his faint whispers. His eyes were closed, and he appeared almost insensible.

He opened his eyes when I touched him, and even winked in his comical fashion, but as though to save him the exertion of talking.

'I daren't move,' he said, immediately closing his eyes again.

I thought that it was best to leave him in the position that he had taken up, and not to try to better it, under the doubtful circumstances. The mast rose up and down on the waves, but with a slow and gentle motion, so that there was not much fear of his slipping off into

the water. Added to which, the mass of canvas kept the water from pouring over him, which might have smothered him indeed had it done so. His legs were dangling in the water, however, and this was not good. A man with a broken bone is always sensitive to the cold, and it was imperative for him to be kept as dry as possible.

I had my knife with me, however, and I made shift to cut away a large piece of canvas; and packing this round him, I had him defended, to an extent, from the wind. Also I raised his feet from out of the water; and bound them loosely to the mast, so as to keep him in one position; and that as dry a one as possible.

He rewarded my attentions with another wink, and having done all I could see the possibility of doing, I got upright on the mast again; and looked about at the horizon.

I had not told André of our abandoned position, and was glad that he had not asked about it; for now I saw that our unfortunate vessel had got so far away that there was no reasonable prospect that she would return to look for us; whilst of any hope from another vessel, I could imagine none.

We were alone, on the wide sea; and it was now nearly quite dark. It is not possible to conceive a more forlorn and hopeless plight than that which afflicted us two unfortunate young men than we were in at that moment.

Then night came on.



Chapter 14

IT was several hours before any sign came of relief, and before that I was almost beyond hope for my poor André.

As time went on he became unable even to whisper to me, though he could still wink when I asked him how he fared. But I could see that his pallor had disappeared, and that there was now a bright red spot on either cheek which spoke of a rising fever. It was high time that help came.

Towards midnight the sea had calmed a good deal, but I could do nothing more for André. Instead of bothering him, and trying to put him into some fancied easier position than the one he had chosen for himself, I let him lie quiet; and, for the rest, looked constantly about the horizon in order to descry the first signs of relief.

After a while the moon rose, and this seemed a more hopeful sign. But I found I could not keep my erect position all the time, and I was frequently compelled

to rest. At last, too, I think I must have fallen asleep; for, in the middle of a dream, as it might have been, I thought I heard a voice hailing me.

Looking up hastily I found it was no dream, but a real hail.

'Ahoy!' the voice called again, and I got up on my feet instantly to see a boatload of men pulling towards me.

They had called in English, and I replied in that language.

'Ahoy, hearties!' I called out; and then the order came, — 'Pull away, men!' and soon a boat of British Jack Tars came right up to the spot where we lay on the waves.

They were Englishmen, but at any rate they were men; and for André's sake I was glad enough to see them. I had some qualms as to how we should be received by them, when they discovered that we were what my English friend, John, would term 'foreigners'; but I felt that any set of men seeing our terrible plight would deal with us mercifully.

The officer in charge of the boat found that he could not back her into the maze of canvas in order to get to the mast, so he ordered two of his men to mount the spar, and cut away the canvas until the road was clear. This they did, and revealed to their gaze two of us; and, at first, I thought they took us for Englishmen.

'Ahoy! Where's your ship? Has it gone down? You've never been bowled over by the Johnny Crapauds, have you?' asked the lieutenant.

'No, sir,' I replied. 'Our mast broke off short, and my friend here was on it at the time. He is badly

hurt. Can he be conveyed on board with as little disarrangement as possible? His ribs are broken.'

'Ay, ay! We'll see to that. Here, you fellows, cut up some of that canvas, and make a sling. Mind the paint.'

This was to the two men who had mounted the mast, and they gave a ready 'ay, ay, sir,' and fell to work; and in a very short time they had André lying easily in an improvised hammock; and were bearing him, gently, to the boat.

These two men had been nearer to us than their mates, and I could see that they looked strangely at us, when they first came on to the mast; and, after a minute, I heard one of them say, in a whisper, 'Young Froggies, this lot!'

The other winked in reply, but neither said anything when we were got aboard the boat. Nor did the officer ask any questions; though I fancied that he was on the point of doing so, when we were got in. However, he checked himself; and looked at us in silent curiosity.

The ship they belonged to was a very small, but no doubt speedy frigate, mounting some couple of dozen guns. We got to this as quickly as we could.

'What luck?' was the query of some one as soon as we got near to the side.

'A couple of young fellows, sir,' was the reply. 'I can't quite place them.'

'What's the difficulty?' was asked.

'Ought to be English. But they ain't!' was the laconic reply.

'Oh! Send 'em up! We'll sort 'em out!'

'Right, sir. Will you lower the sling? One of them's damaged, and seems in a queer way.'

'No time to bother. Let the men get aboard, and bring the cripple up with the boat. Tumble up, lively!'

This was all that was said, and as it could not be helped that we had run foul of a British ship, I could only pray that my poor friend might survive the transfer to the hands of the surgeon. I thought that he might get cared for by those whose business it was to look after the sick; even though these others did not promise much, as far as I could see.

We were quickly got on deck, the officer in charge letting me remain with André until we reached the deck, when I was ushered into the presence of the lieutenant, who had charge.

He, too, made a careful examination of me, before asking any questions as to our identity; André remaining in the arms of the men who had taken him out of the boat; as he was far gone, at this moment.

'Well,' said the officer, after a pause, 'and how d'ye account for this, young feller. Two young Frenchmen togged up in British uniforms?'

I then saw what was the matter. André and I had managed to become possessed of the uniforms of a couple of English middies. So I set in to inform the lieutenant, in my best English, how it had happened.

'Oh!' he said, rather doubtingly I thought, when I had finished.

A little more talk, however, seemed to convince him, rather against his will, as he was rather grumpy about it.

Of course, one could not expect to be lightly received, by one's country's enemies, under the circumstances;

and I dare say that I should have been equally dubious had any Englishman suddenly appeared before me, accoutred in a French uniform. However, seeing that André was in a really bad plight, the lieutenant ordered him below to the sick bay; and I was glad to see him being conveyed there with as much care as could have been bestowed on an English seaman. I remained, for a time, with the lieutenant.

He put me through a course of questions as to the state of affairs in my native country; but, being well aware that it was my duty to keep my own counsel, he got very little information. However, he did not seem to expect me to know much about the political affairs of France; and, in fact, it was plain to me that he knew more than I did. But in the matter of the shipping that was to be found about the neighbourhood, I thought it did not matter whether I spoke of it or not; and after letting him know that there were supposed to be very few British ships at all in the neighbourhood of Corsica, or the mainland, at present; and when he had satisfied himself on this point I found I had made a mistake after all, for he said, – ‘Ah, well, that means that Admiral Nelson does not know yet that your Master Boney has managed to land in France. Well, we shall have to get the news across to him. He’s wasting his time looking for him in the direction of Malta.’

The lieutenant thought this particular of sufficient importance to have his captain aroused; and I had to go below to the captain’s cabin, to be put through the same course of questions. This time I was more careful, so that I added nothing to what I had already revealed;

but it was too late to recall my statements to the lieutenant; and it was not likely that any alteration of them would have had the slightest effect if I had done so. But what I had already revealed was sufficient to settle the course of my life, for the next short time; for, after a thoughtful consideration, the captain gave his verdict to his officer in the single word, 'Malta'; and turning in again, he left it to him to shape a course accordingly.

The only satisfaction I had in this was to find out that the chase of the unfortunate schooner, in which we had voyaged from Ajaccio, had to be given up; and, as appeared afterwards, this was the saving of her. In the meantime, however, André and I were on a British ship, bound for the main fleet of our enemies; so that the outlook for us two was very poor indeed.

After that I was permitted to go below to see what had become of my poor friend.

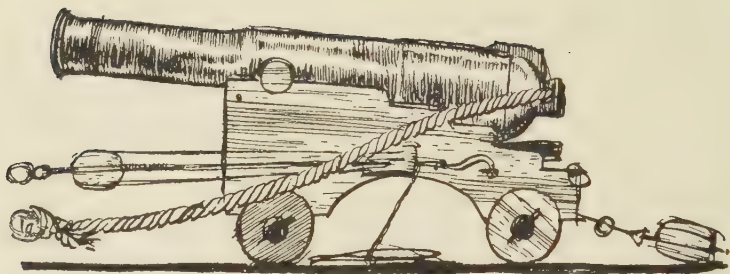
I found him in the sick bay; and was satisfied to see that the surgeon had been called, and was doing his best to rescue the poor fellow from what had appeared, a little while ago, his certain fate.

The sailors who had carried André below, had told the surgeon's mate that his chief was not to be disturbed by the lieutenant's orders; but he, after a brief examination of his patient, simply went off to call his superior; who, though a grumpy fellow, who complained about being called up at this hour of night, merely to attend to a paltry Froggie, had instantly set about the task imposed on him; and, after an hour's careful work, had given André's affairs such a turn for the better that he had lost much of his fever;

and, swathed and bandaged, so that he could not move sufficiently to do himself any further mischief, he was able to be pronounced in very little danger. 'Not that a Froggie matters much; an' be damned to 'um!' said the surgeon; as, his business finished, he reeled sleepily off to bed again.

However, his words mattered very little. We expected no tenderness, and very little sympathy from an enemy; but indeed, we had got such attention as we could scarcely have bettered under our own flag; for there was small time to spare for attention to the sick, under the tricolour, in those stirring times.

As for myself, not having received any precise orders except to – 'Get out of those duds,' which I took to mean the uniform I had unwittingly donned, and to put on some old clothes that left me no better provided for than I had been on the way to Corsica, I thought that, having done so, I was at liberty to turn in. So finding an empty bunk in the sick bay, I took possession of it, and lay down to a rest that I was beginning to feel that I very much needed.



Chapter 15

THE light of morning revealed to me the presence of two English sailors, occupying bunks in the same place where André and I were. They were talking together, and, being curious, I listened to what it was they had to say.

'There'll be a row, Bill. I warrant!' said one of them.

'Not they!' said the other. 'We'm orders not to fight. We're watching, not fighting!'

'That's all right enough, but I tells you as the ole man'll not pass a Frenchie if he can help it. We'll be in it, in less than arf a 'our!'

'Well, we'll 'ave to turn out then. 'Ow many guns did McInnerey say?'

'Thirty-two, an' eighteen pounders, by the look of them.'

'Hum! We've only twenty-four nines, an' the two small 'uns. It's a fair match, Bill.'

'All right for that, but the cap's orders is not to fight unless obliged. 'E'll 'ave to min' wot 'e's about!'

'You leave 'im alone. 'E'll find a way not to get past wi'out. Summat'll go wrong, don't you fret.'

Then there was silence for a bit, followed by –

‘Well, I’d rayther be above decks, if there’s a bother. Wot d’ye say, Bill?’

‘I’m fer up, as soon’s the bizz begins. I don’t fancy being down ’ere, and bein’ chawed up by a cannon-shot wi’out the chance of ’eaving one back at the beggars. Wot about you?’

‘Same!’

Now my English was scarcely fit to cope with what I was listening to at this moment. I had had no experience with any of that country except my friend John Fogarthy; and his talk was, naturally, a more cultured variety, and more according to the books. I could not understand, either, what they meant by saying that twenty-four nine-pounders and an English ship, was a fair match for thirty-two eighteens, and a French one. But I had not quite grasped the fact, at that date, that that was the average sort of idea that English sailors had of the qualities of the two navies. It was a mortifying experience when, later, I found that this was so.

Not having received anybody’s orders to the contrary I thought I might venture on deck to see for myself what was toward; accordingly, I went quietly up the companion-way, and looked out.

There I saw, overseas, a French vessel that was evidently doing her best to intercept us. She was south-west, and had the weather of us; but it was doubtful, just at present, if she could intercept us without a little assistance on our part.

The Britons were at quarters in anticipation of a battle. They made little noise amongst their ranks, but

I could see that they were talking cheerfully to one another about the coming contest. The captain and his first officer were on the quarter-deck together, their glasses constantly to their eyes. A second-lieutenant was on the gun-deck below, awaiting, in silence, any message from his superiors above. All was ready, as I could see.

The ship's course had apparently not been changed from overnight still heading for the south-east, and, very likely, Malta; and there was no appearance at present that the commander of the frigate was abandoning his purpose of the voyage to Malta, with his important news in order to fight an avoidable engagement. However, I noticed that the sheets of the main course were slackened, and we were not getting the full benefit of the wind, which was on our starboard quarter. It was certain that unless anything unforeseen occurred, a battle was imminent, and as it was my first engagement, you may be sure that I was a little excited about it; more especially as the vessel that I was on was an enemy vessel, and not one of my own country.

Having quickly satisfied my curiosity, I prudently withdrew; going back to André, whom I was pleased to find still quietly asleep; and evidently making good progress towards recovery.

It was in about half an hour, as the sailor below had conjectured, that the battle began.

The first signs of it came from overseas, for the French ship, having the advantage in the matter of the superior calibre of its guns, was able to pour in shot after shot, without our being able to give any sort of reply.

The first results I could not see, but I fancy that it was our spars and rigging that was suffering; the other evidently wishing to cripple our sailing power, so that we could not escape. From their position, no doubt, it looked as though we were doing all we could to get away from the apparently unequal contest. I was sure, though, that this was not the case. But one or two minor crashes overhead told that there was some effect from the firing.

There was, as yet, no reply from the British vessel; but, what I could not understand, there was a subdued cheer, every now and then, from the English sailors, which seemed to greet any successful shot from the French side. 'That's a good 'un! Go it, Froggie!' and so on, followed by a not too-stern caution to keep silence, from the officer commanding. It seemed to me, however, that these English sailors were not a bad sort of fellow to have on one's side. Nothing, apparently, appealed to them, unless they were personally damaged; and then they made little fuss over it. It was 'no use crying over spilt milk!' in their own jargon, when that occurred to one. I could only hope that my own countrymen were constituted the same; but, of course, I had had, as yet, no experience of fighting by their side.

It was nearly another half-hour before we were able to reply to this cannonade. Then, after we received some more serious damage from the French ship, which, from the noise overhead told me had had the result of bringing down one of our larger spars, there was a cry of - 'Are you ready, below?' followed by a stentorian, 'Ay, ay, sir.' Then, - 'Fire!'

A roar of all the British broadside followed this. Then silence and – ‘Another five minutes, Mr. Westlock.’ It seemed that our shot was too feeble to get across the distance that separated the two vessels.

The tactics of the other vessel now changed somewhat. Instead of firing at our spars, which must, by then, have been sufficiently damaged, they were now engaged in the effort to damage our personnel and armament. They were evidently sure that we could not sail out of range again, and were taking steps to make the ultimate capture of the British vessel a certainty. After this there were cries from the gun-deck that told of men being hit. The sterner work of the battle had now begun.

André had now awakened, and had asked me what was happening. I told him that we were in the midst of a battle, and he instantly demanded to be allowed to get up, and take his own share of the affair. I had then to remind him that we were prisoners on board a British ship, and not on one of our own country; and he lay back again, with a groan, ‘Just my luck,’ he whispered.

The English surgeon had paid us a hasty visit, a few minutes before, examining my friend, and just nodding to me, as though to say he was going on all right. The two English sailors had asked him if they were ready for duty yet, receiving a sharp ‘No!’ But it was followed by a ‘Not unless you are called for,’ which served to mollify them somewhat.

They had been showing signs of restlessness for some time and, in the absence of the surgeon and his mates, who all seemed now to be fully employed with

wounded men, they got out of their bunks, and began to exercise their limbs and feel their muscles as if to make ready to engage in the conflict.

'Never felt better in my life, Bill!' pronounced one of them.

'No; nor me ayther!' replied the other. 'Ole Macintosh is a fraud. Never 'ad nothing but a bilious attack.'

Here he gave evidence of one by becoming very sick.

'There!' he said triumphantly, when he had recovered his powers of speech; 'that shows!'

'That's bile, right enough!' said the other gravely. 'Nowt like the open air for bile, Bill. What d'ye say?'

'Right-o! Ole sawbones 'll be busy now. I'm for the open-air life. It's enough to kill a 'ealthy man like me to be so much below. Come on.'

I don't know what was the matter with the man, but in spite of his cheerfulness, he could hardly stand, for a time, until by dint of walking up and down the floor, with the help of his fellow, he was able to proceed to the upper regions of the ship. Then they disappeared, leaving my friend and myself in the rather melancholy silence of the sick bay.

The silence, of course, only referred to our immediate surroundings. Above decks there was noise enough; and it seemed to increase in violence, at each moment.

Some of the crashes overhead were terrible, and I could fancy that, at times, the ship must be overwhelmed.

Once the ship had a dangerous list to starboard, which seemed to put the British guns, for a time, out of action. However, she recovered, and the battle was renewed.

We had no news from the upper decks, of course. The surgeon was busily engaged with the wounded, which seemed to come freshly to his hands, at every minute; and, occasionally, one of his mates would bring in an unfortunate fellow, banded, and speechless, and



lay him out of the way in one of the bunks. These presented a pitiful sight of helpless humanity.

None of the shots had appeared to take effect near us; and I was not sorry for that. As it was, my poor friend André fainted, at one part of the engagement; and I was afraid that he was dead. But, on examination, I convinced myself that it was only the effect

of the excitement in his weakened state, that accounted for it; and instead of trying to revive him, I left him as he was, thinking that it would do him no harm to be unconscious whilst the action raged with such fury as it was just then.



After a time there seemed to come a lull in the firing, and, as I was anxious for some news, I determined to take a trip up to the top-deck, to see what was transpiring there.

Everywhere it was a scene of desolation on what had been a short two hours before, a gallant, well-found ship.

Not a mast was standing, and I thought, for the moment, that the battle had ended in the taking of the British ship by her adversary. Her twenty-four nine-pounders had not, in spite of the boasts of the English sailors, been a match for the superior armament of the French vessel. The damage was fearful. The bulwarks were shot away, and the men, — far fewer in number than had begun that dreadful conflict — were being tended where they lay, wounded, on the gun-deck; the rest leaning against the guns, awaiting, perchance, for some order to renew the battle. But, as far as I could see, the action was over.

But the next thing I saw was the French ship, which lay on the waves, not fifty metres away; and, to my dismay, I saw that she was in exactly the same plight as the English vessel. For, in truth, it was exactly as the sick sailor had said, the ships were a match for one another. Both had fought on until, apparently, neither had any capacity to fight on further.

This was soon proved to be the case, for I heard a conversation bellowed between the English captain and that of the French vessel, in which each claimed the victory, and invited the other to haul down a perfectly useless flag, and to surrender; which other seemed, in neither case, able to take advantage of a so-called victory. If there could have been comedy in that fearful business, this was one.

True to the traditions of his race, the English captain was compelled to carry on the conversation in his own language; the Frenchman being in a somewhat better position.

I don't know how it is, unless what I had heard

from my friend John is correct, but very few English seem able to acquire the finest language in the world. John used to boast that it was because the French had never been to England to teach their language, the same as they had been to all other parts of Europe. And, he added, they never would go there.

Said the English commander; 'Good morning, monsieur. You have fought a gallant fight, but it is useless to prolong it. If you will now send a boat we will come and take possession.'

Said the Frenchman: 'Pardon, but monsieur, who has fought exceedingly well, will now be good enough to send us a boat; and we will come and take the remains of his fine ship.'

To this the Englishman replied: 'Monsieur, I regret to say that it is not in my power to send you a boat, as we have not any remaining. But if you will be good enough to use your own, I offer you the whole of my vessel provided you can take it.'

And the Frenchman, again: 'Monsieur, nothing would give me greater pleasure, but it is an unfortunate fact that there is not a boat left to me that has any power to float. If monsieur is equally badly fixed, I see nothing for it but to await whilst we can build one.'

That was all that I heard, at the time, for, catching the eye of the English lieutenant, I was reminded of the fact that I was on an enemy vessel; and that I was sort of eavesdropping. Which, as it hardly became a lieutenant in the service of the great Republic, I put an end to by retreating below.

I left the two vessels at the mercy of the waves, and drifting apart from one another. Their respective com-

manders were, apparently, busying themselves in the effort to rig up jury-masts. This was not too easy, as both ships had had to cut away the wreckage of their fallen spars; and these had drifted to a considerable distance; and neither had any boat that they could send to secure any portion of them.

One of the English sailors swam, at length, quite a quarter of a mile, with a great length of rope attached to his body, and managed to secure one of the smaller masts of his vessel; and, fastening the line to it, he was towed triumphantly back, seated on his capture.

But, at the same time, the French frigate had managed to get hold of one of her own spars; and thereafter it was a race which ship could get her mast up first, so as to have the advantage of the other.

Curiously enough neither side seemed to wish to interfere with the work of the other; each seeming well content that they should start fair, as it were; and be in a position to continue what had been, hitherto, – an equal combat.

Nevertheless, it was ordained that there should be no continuation of the battle at that time; for the vessels had now drifted apart, very considerably; and by the time that the masts were up, at pretty much the same moment, they were too far away from one another for their guns to be of much effect. Also, as far as the British vessel was concerned, it was now found that her helm had received such an amount of damage, that they were no longer able to steer her.

And so they continued to drift until night came on, which put an end to all prospects for any immediate renewal of the conflict.



THEREAFTER IT WAS A RACE WHICH



SHIP COULD GET HER MAST UP FIRST

Chapter 16

DURING the night the Englishmen had managed to recover another of their masts; and thus with two they had some superiority over the enemy, who had only recovered one of theirs.

But, as it turned out, there was altogether too little wind for the Islanders to take much advantage from the fact. It was plain, however, from what I heard of the talk of the sailors, that they had no idea of going away without a further effort to capture their enemy. They seemed to think that this was the only compensation they could expect for the loss of their voyage, the taking or destroying of the vessel that had opposed them.

This was natural enough, and though there seemed little opportunity, at present, for the accomplishing this purpose, these obstinate Britons stuck to it, even to the point of constructing rafts ready for the event of getting near enough to use them for boarding the French ship.

More than a third of them had been either killed, or more or less seriously wounded, but they argued that the enemy must be in even worse plight; for they could not understand but what they must have inflicted far worse punishment than they had received. However, there was one other matter, which I was not yet aware of, which kept them from an immediate advance upon the enemy; namely, the helm of the British ship had received such damage that it was quite out of action for the present. Whilst that remained to be repaired they had had to float a mass of wreckage

astern, which, whilst it served to keep the ship before the wind, it did not enable her crew to steer any course that would bring them into conflict with the French ship until the latter was also in a position to invite it. The odds then seemed to be about equal, for the present.

My friend André had recovered a good deal, during the night, though he had received no further attention from the ship's surgeon, who had been fully occupied, the night through, with his own wounded countrymen. However, I made shift to procure him some food and stimulants from time to time, as well as doing what I could to relieve the pains of the wounded men who lay in the bunks around me.

This business gave me a certain freedom of movement which I took advantage of to ascertain what our position was in respect to the other vessel. I had it always in mind that I was sailing under the wrong colours; and though I could see no sort of opportunity for an exchange to the French ship, I meant to get aboard her if chance should bring us into contact at all.

When André had come to his senses again I told him what had been the result of the preceding day's battle; also what was in my mind as to getting aboard our own proper ship, even at the cost of leaving him behind; and he agreed that it was my duty to do so, if the opportunity did come. The best thing, of course, would be for the French ship to take the English one, and settle things that way. But we had no means of knowing what the likelihood of that was; and seeing how well the English ship had recovered from the terrific bombardment she had suffered, I thought that

it was quite possible that the chance might be the other way about.

None of the unwounded Britons were allowed to rest during the night after the battle; nor for most of the next day.

The guns, many of which had been dismounted from their carriages, were overhauled; and the least damaged of them put in trim, on fresh carriages; and all but about two of them were rescued for further service. Then the jury-masts were, one after the other, taken down again, during the time that they were of so little advantage to us because of the damage to the helm; and they were re-stepped, and their sails refitted to their smaller dimensions; so that they presented a more practical outlook for sailing when the time came.

Towards the end of the afternoon the British preparations were, with the exception of the helm, which was still occupying the attention of the carpenter and his mates, pretty well as complete as they could be; and most of the men were piped below for a much-needed rest.

I have no doubt but what a very similar business had been going on in the French vessel, but of this, of course, we could not be certain, and the two ships were still, to all intents and purposes, drifting helplessly farther and farther apart; never, apparently, to come into contact again. There was still little wind on, and in our own case, it was not of much concern whether there was much or little, for we could have taken no advantage of it.

In the meantime I had caught sight of the false helm that had been constructed; and I studied this a good

deal. It seemed to me that it would make a pretty efficient sort of raft for a limited number of persons. I even thought, with some envy, that it might do quite well for me, provided I were in a position to use it as such. But, at present, I could see no way of getting at it.

The first sign of change that came, however, was not one of an increase of wind, but, to judge from the looks of the British crew, one of still greater importance. This was the sight of a ship on the horizon, to the south-west. It was heading in our direction, and, for a time, there was nothing to indicate of what nationality she was.

She, of course, was labouring under the same disability as to wind as ourselves; but she had the advantage of a full complement of masts. For an hour or two, as they were finishing their labours on deck, the crew were anxiously awaiting some sign of her nationality; and at last it was decided, rather to the men's consternation, that she was a French barque; and one of sufficient calibre to make it a doubtful experiment to engage her in our own damaged condition.

Our captain, however, seemed to take the matter very coolly. He made no alteration in his arrangements, but sent the men below, for their rest, which, as they had been constantly employed for the whole of two days, they much needed. The carpenter, with such labour as he required for his work, was still at it; and until he had completed the repairs to the helm it was of little use for the vessel to try to haul away from the threatened danger. Under the circumstances I thought that our commander was behaving with con-

siderable coolness. However, the vessel was now in a fair condition for a further battle, if so be it was found impossible to escape one; and from what I had seen of her and her crew it would be no small affair if it did come to a contest.

It was my own affairs however that were engaging my most serious attention just at this moment.

The dismissal below of the crew had left the gun-deck pretty clear; and I took advantage of the fact to look through the portholes, which had been left open, in order, I suppose, to be ready, at the shortest notice, to engage the new-comer.

A marine was on guard, pacing the gun-deck; but, apparently, was himself drowsy, and seemed to be taking little notice of anything. I could not tell whether or not he had seen me take up a position near one of the after-guns; but if he did I think he must soon have forgotten me; for, though I kept an eye on him, for some time, he never seemed to look towards where I was crouching down, as much covered by the gun as I could contrive; and I took care that no further movement of mine should attract his attention.

The small watch on the upper deck was well occupied with keeping an eye on the French barque, as well as attending to the sailing of their own ship; and no other persons except those engaged about the damaged helm showed any sign of their presence. And so the time wore on.

At length the repairs to the helm seemed to have reached a satisfactory conclusion, for there was a cheery outburst of talk above, and I could see that the mass of wreckage that had been used to steer the vessel;

— or rather to keep her on the one line, for that is the most that it was capable of doing; — had been cut away. The job was, evidently, completed.

And as I saw the improvised helm begin to drift slowly to leeward, the thought came again that it would have served, admirably, as a raft for one; — and that one, myself.

The marine had now taken up a position near the companion way, and was leaning against it, his face turned from my direction. He might have been dozing, indeed, though that did not matter much, I felt that I could slip out, at any time, without being seen by him. And there was a loose rope on the deck near me, which I got hold of, and, quietly attaching it to a gun-carriage, lowered it into the water.

I was an exceptionally good swimmer, having an easy stroke that took but little strength out of me, and I could, at a pinch, keep my head above water for two or three hours at a time. I thought I might easily slip through the porthole, without being either seen or heard; and there was the rope ready for me to reach the water without making the smallest commotion. — I thought that any fellow with a little pluck (like my English friend John) would certainly make use of that rope and find his way to freedom.

The only risk I ran, or so I imagined, was that the men on the upper deck, who would certainly be on the look-out towards that vessel that was slowly overhauling them, might manage to spot me, as my course lay directly in that line. What chance was there that they might overlook me?

I thought it over, for some time, then tired of think-

ing, I caught the rope in my hands, and looking towards the sentry, who still maintained the same drowsy position, his head against the stairway, thought I would just try if the rope held my weight easily. So I slipped out of the porthole, and just a few inches down; and, before I could decide that I was actually doing the trick, I slipped farther down, and in a few seconds was in the water.

Once there I did not trouble myself to think anything further. I let the rope go, and began to drift.

I made no effort to swim away from the abandoned vessel, merely letting her float away from me. Keeping my head as low in the water as I could, I trod water, and kept so until she was a good five-hundred metres away from me, and then struck out for my objective.

I thought it did not matter now if I were to be seen. My captors had other things to think of than putting the ship about in order to re-take an escaping prisoner; whilst I was already too far away to be touched by a rifle bullet, even if I were seen. I was free.

Then I made for the raft that was still in sight; and, in less than half an hour, I was seated on it.

Then, indeed, I had to think again how far was I free.

I had been rather reluctant to face one fact, so long as I was only speculating as to whether or not I should try it on, and that was, – would the French ship pass me near enough to notice me on my raft? And now I was well in for it; it seemed to me that it was very like, indeed, that she would miss me, in the most natural way in the world.

I could see that she did not alter her course, but it remained to be proved that she would not do so long before she got up to me.

Possibly the British ship would do so; and then, without a doubt the one chasing her would imitate her movements. It was touch and go.

However, I could not help myself now, whatever happened; so I endeavoured to make myself as comfortable as I could on my frail barque; stripping, and wringing the water out of my clothes; and arranging the planks that composed my raft as well as I could so that they should not part company, and leave me to the mercy of the waves; I turned my attention, once more, to the vessel that had now come perceptibly nearer.

It had grown pretty dark before this, and I was more anxious then.

I could no longer discern the vessel I had abandoned, but it occurred to me that the ship that was in pursuit of her would be better fixed in that respect, as her men would be so much higher above the water than I was. I could see, however, that the Frenchman was still bearing the same course, though, at the same time, I could but dimly make out her lines in the growing dusk.

But now the vessel had approached so closely I began to feel more nervous about being seen on the face of the waters. It seemed to me that so small an object as I presented could hardly fail to be passed over, even if the vessel came within hail of me. And now I came to think of it, I felt that I had made a strange mistake in abandoning the British vessel; for if this representative of my own nation were only in earnest

in taking the other, it was, perhaps, only a question of time. She was a larger vessel, and had the advantage of having her enemy shorn of a good part of her smaller fighting power. I had simply needed to await the event, and now it looked as though I had merely put it out of her power to effect my deliverance.

Well, the time wore on slowly enough. The wind was so quiet that progress was necessarily slow, and I was almost in despair, at last, thinking the ship would never reach me.

The night was at its darkest when, suddenly, as it seemed, after my weary waiting, she seemed to loom upon me, out of the darkness, as though she had leapt the remaining gap between us; and appeared right above me. But the fact was that I had become so numbed with exposure, which was telling on me, that I had nearly fallen into a stupor.

But realizing that deliverance was now at hand, if I only could take the opportunity, I roused myself, and stood upright on the raft, and shouted with all the force of my lungs.

It was fortunate, now, that the ship had got so near to me. Had she been but a very few yards further away my weakened voice would never have carried. As it was I felt how feeble the sound of my voice was in that expanse of waters, and I feared that it could never reach the deck of the barque.

However, the miracle happened, and I heard a returning hail. With but a slight turn of her helm, the bulk came towards me.

Her sides scraped my frail craft, to the danger of overturning it. Indeed, for the moment, I was in

danger from the collision, for it was sufficient to unbind the timbers that composed it; and, failing immediate rescue, I should have been compelled to rely for my support on a miserable plank. But just at the moment that the ship touched a rope descended from her side, with an order to me to get hold, and hang on. This I did, quickly enough, taking a turn about my body, and launching myself into the waves, once more, holding on, like grim death.

Then I felt myself pulled along, as the vessel continued her course; and directions given to the man, or men, at the other end of the rope. And, in a short time, I stood safely on the Frenchman's deck.

Chapter 17

IN less than a week after that I stood, once more, upon the soil of France.

Our chase of the British vessel had proved a vain one. We could scarcely have failed in taking her, had the opportunity been offered of a clear field, such as we might have enjoyed some months before, when there were few, if any, British ships in the Mediterranean; but the expedition to Egypt had attracted them, and their Nelson was again active in our seas. Thus there was no possibility of any of our vessels being allowed to go unmolested if they were more than a day or two out of port, and very little of their being allowed to get out at all. So we were destined to be baulked of the prize that we had expected in the ship that had taken André and me out of the water where we had found ourselves after that adventure in the schooner from Corsica.

After a few hours' sailing, we had got into touch with her, right enough, but at the moment we did so, we caught sight of the fleet of the mighty Admiral who had destroyed our good ships near the mouth of the Nile the preceding year, and who was now looking for the chance to snap up our equally mighty General on the same waters.

Nelson had only just found out that the general had escaped him, and he was coming back, full of wrath at the way in which he had been tricked, to beleaguer our ports once more.

So it was Nelson who took possession of the quarry we sought, also of that vessel which had fought such a gallant fight against her. As for my friend André,

he had to go with his captors to England, leaving me to get to France again, there to tell what had become of him, and to finish the task we had jointly undertaken for our friend M. Jehan, in Corsica. This I managed to the satisfaction of himself, and his partner at Marseilles, after which I returned to Toulon.

The Commandant, André's uncle, received me graciously. He rather surprised me, in fact, for he seemed to have formed the opinion that I had acquitted myself so well, that he believed that I was remarkably well qualified to undertake any important mission that might be committed to me. I was surprised, I say, because I had formed the private opinion that I was especially unfortunate in falling foul of any cross-circumstance that could possibly get in the way of anyone who had anything of importance entrusted to him; and that I must really strike anyone as being the very last person to trust such matters to. However, he did not appear to think so, nor did any of the others who had to be consulted about such matters. But, of course, it was not my place to criticize my masters. I was at their disposal, whatever rash undertakings they designed me for; and whether they were ill-advised or not, in employing me, I could not choose but obey.

The news I got, on landing, was that my great idol, Napoleon, had, as had been expected, suppressed the feeble Directory, and, together with two others, had been appointed Consul, in imitation of the Roman system. This had been a great relief to the nation, which had become disheartened by the weakness of the Government, and the danger in which the Republic stood in consequence.

During the months that the great general had been absent from Europe nearly the whole of his glorious gains had been swept away; and, for good or ill, France had been penned in her own frontiers once again.

Italy, our greatest gain, had been again overrun by her traditional oppressors, the Austrians; and the Italians had had reason to deplore the readiness with which their princes had shaken off the yoke of their French conquerors. True, it had cost them something to have the advantage of employing our armies in their defence, but it was a poor spirit to show an unwillingness to pay for their deliverance from a foreign power. But a few months had served to show them that they had made a poor exchange. It was the task of our great general to reverse the position once more, and a very short time was sufficient to accomplish this.

In less than a year, Napoleon had retaken, not only Italy, but all the rest of the provinces of Europe that had been temporarily attached to France. And there was a sort of peace, once more.

During this time of land-conquest I was, perforce, inactive; that is to say that I had no employment on a ship, except in harbour, or in taking voyages of no greater duration than a couple of days or so at a time, going from one southern French port to another. The English had fastened us in again, and were watching our ports like so many cats watching at a mouse-hole.

However, it was no secret that our Chief Consul had, now that the question of the land-conquest was over for the time being, been bringing his mighty mind to bear upon the problem of meeting the English on their favourite element.

Once more a fleet was being built in the harbours of our ally, Holland; as well as in the great French dockyards; and now that Napoleon had what was really the supreme power in the nation, there was a great hope arising amongst us that, at last, we were to challenge, successfully, the power of the Kings of the Sea.

And so, as the months went by, the French fleet did again become a power on the waters.

That was what all patriotic Frenchmen wished to see. It was galling for us to feel that, whatever successes we gained upon the land and, under Napoleon, there seemed no limit to these, we were always faced upon the waters with a powerlessness that was equally great. The stubborn Islanders could neither be persuaded nor coerced; and they showed a prudence in not trusting their feeble armies to the tender mercies of the glorious French legions on the land that was at least equal to the boldness and dash which they exhibited on the seas. But as our fleet grew, they sought ever new alliances with the peoples of the Continent; but as, one after another, they were dissolved by the shocks of our continual victories, they became alarmed. And then they too sought peace.

Then a treaty was signed; our fleets were free of the seas; and my real education as an officer of the Republican Navy was at last to begin.

Now, many of my mates thought that the peace with England meant that we sailors would simply find ourselves out of employment. But it soon proved quite otherwise, for our master Napoleon took immediate advantage of the release of our vessels, to find them the opportunities for that work and training which

he could well see was what we needed in order to get ready for the contest with the Sea-kings which he had set his heart upon. That was still to come; and he meant that when it did so we should, if possible, be ready to meet the Islanders on equal terms. He meant to show our haughty foes that it had been but the lack of opportunity that had made the invincible French nation the inferiors of the British on the waters, as we felt they were on the land; which they had the foresight not to challenge.

Instead of finding my career cut short by lack of opportunity, judge then my delight when, but a day or two after the signing of the Peace of Amiens, our fellows were warned to prepare for an important voyage.

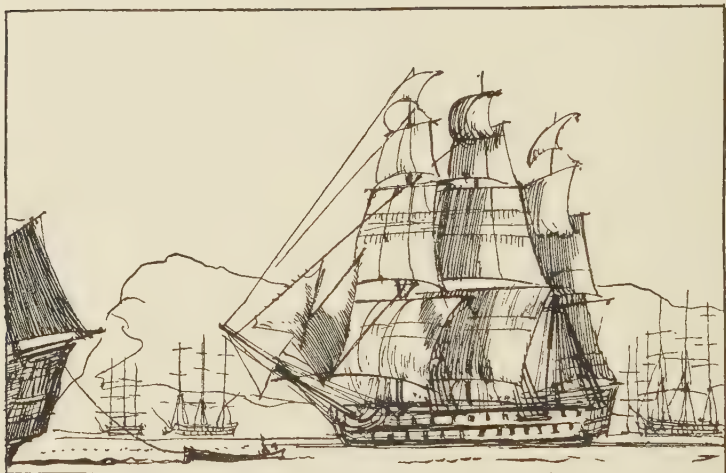
And even the most backward of us felt a new spirit within him when the order came.

Though I was still no more than eighteen when that period of my life began I had had some little experience of the sea which some of my seniors had missed; so that I did not feel any sort of disadvantage with them.

I had been posted on the *Violante*, the barque that had rescued me, in mid-sea, soon after my adventure with André; and by the time that we were free to move abroad there did not seem any reason, to my superiors, why I should give way to an older officer. I had taken whatever opportunities came my way to study the routine of the sea, and could have stood any examination that I should have been called upon to do. However, even that was deemed unnecessary; and, at the age of eighteen then I found myself second lieutenant of the *Violante*; bound on a voyage to the West Indies, a part of the world which I had always wished to see.

We departed from Toulon, in the spring of 1801, all of us in the very best of spirits.

Our voyage across the Atlantic was uneventful. The sole thrill we experienced was the sight of the British fleet gathered, sulkily, under the Rock of Gibraltar. This was the mighty fleet of ships, then, that had caused us so much damage; and stationed there, under



that frowning rock, all in fine order, ready to set sail at a moment's notice, I thought it was fortunate for us that peace had been declared; for it would not have been in the power of our flotilla, the finest display of ships that the Republic could get together at that time, to have escaped destruction at the hands of these famous fighters. No! It was well as it was. Perhaps, in a few years, we might be in a position to cope with the Islanders; but not just then.

Arriving near our destination, we found that our

own vessel had a separate commission, which was to take us away from the main fleet. Accordingly, after a four-weeks' voyage, we parted from them, and betook ourselves on our own errand.

Our mission was vaguely understood, by the junior officers, to be a visit of inspection to certain of the smaller colonies amongst the islands; after which we



were to rejoin the fleet near the mainland of North America.

We now had a real touch of foreign experience; for we were on our own, and we had to guard ourselves amidst the vessels of many nations, which, as well as the British, we might find ourselves arrayed against should any unexpected rupture of the new peace come about whilst we were amongst them. And, of course, we had to 'find our sea-legs,' and see what we were worth in the way of navigation. Also, as we soon found,

to our cost, the troublous times had been favourable to the growth of pirate-vessels; which, under the guise of privateersmen, were proving a scourge to the nations even to which they nominally belonged.

I am sorry to say that my own countrymen had rather a bad name in this respect; for it appeared that though we had considerable difficulty in getting volunteers to sail under the flag of the Republic, there was never any lack of those fellows who were willing to become warriors on their own account. And these seemed to think it quite a fair game to prey on the vessels of their own nationality, in default of any others. Fortunately, we thought, the *Violante*, being a well-found ship, of great sailing power, had little to fear from any of these desperadoes; from whatever quarter they might come.

Perhaps this was the case, under normal circumstances, but it soon appeared that there might be conditions under which we were not immune. We were to have a touch of this difficulty before we were very long in the vicinity of the Spanish Main.

The Spanish Main is, of course, that portion of the mainland of South America touching the Gulf of Mexico. Near here we had a few colonies, the largest of which was French Guiana. This was a large and flourishing colony which had managed to steer clear of difficulties during the troubles in Europe, and was one of our most valuable possessions.

Well, we had not passed many weeks in this quarter when we had come to the conclusion that life aboard was almost as dull and uneventful as life ashore. We had had no incidents in our voyage worthy of record,

excepting a rather severe spell of weather about the time of our separation from the main fleet; but this, we congratulated ourselves, had done us no damage. At any rate, we had found none, at the time. But our commander was a capable sailor, and it was only our general inexperience of these waters that was to prove a grave source of trouble.

So we went on, lightly, taking what pleasure we could ashore, at the different ports, where we spent a few days at a time; and in due course we got our sea-legs, and began to feel ourselves 'old salts,' and ready, we imagined, to meet any foe that could face us on the water. And, as was natural to us, when we had reached the point of becoming rather self-sufficient to ourselves, we did meet a foe; but one which came from an unexpected quarter.



Chapter 18

A FEW days after the storm alluded to in the last chapter, our bosun reported that the foretopmast was creaking badly, and appeared damaged, though he and his mates could not discover the defect.

The captain took advantage of the finer weather to have the spar lowered for examination, and it was decided that the damage was pretty serious, and the spar would have to be replaced, as soon as possible, as it would not stand another puff of wind like the last. The carpenter, indeed, said he could do nothing at all with it; but our armourer, who had been a blacksmith ashore, and had a good deal of confidence in himself, offered to 'shoe' it, as he said; guaranteeing that he could make it hold for months, if need be.

There being nothing against the attempt, the captain consented to his 'shoeing' the topmast, in spite of the carpenter's shrugs, and his significant silence. Accordingly the armourer had a small forge rigged up on deck, and in a very short time, he, and his mates, first fastening a thin plate of metal round the bole of the mast, in order to prevent the woodwork from catching fire during his subsequent proceedings, then clapped two flaming masses of iron round the affected part, the heat of which was immediately quenched by the men; and after a test of his work, which was found equal to bearing the weight of as many men who could find a place on the spar, he declared it good enough for anything.

Up went the topmast again, and we sailed on, quite comfortably.



THE CAPTAIN CONSENTED TO HIS 'SHOEING' THE TOPMAST

We had forgotten this incident until, one day, we had it forcibly brought to mind again.

We were in unknown waters, and our charts were a little out of date, for, of course, there are always small but important changes going on in the bed of the ocean, the same as there are on the so-called solid earth; and it behoves one to have the latest marked discoveries of any of Nature's rearrangements, which may come at any time, and are always unexpected.

One day then, whilst we were bowling merrily before a full breeze, though in broad sunshine, and with no indications of any storm brewing, it was our fate to run foul of one of these little rearrangements of the bed of the ocean; and the first we knew of it was to feel a severe bump, that set the ship shivering from stem to stern. – And down came the foretopmast again.

Everybody in the ship was in consternation at this accident; – with the exception, that is to say, of the carpenter, who appeared, from his conduct, to think it the happiest incident that had occurred for a long time. However, the rest of us were concerned because we thought we had struck a rock, the effects of which would soon show in a leak of some sort.

This fear proved groundless, however; and we were immediately afloat again, with no signs of any extra water in our hold. So we soon got over the effects of our surprise, and the wreck was cut away, and the yards and sails taken off the offending spar; when it was cast away so that we could come by no more mishaps from the use of it.

Some more sail was then taken off the vessel, to make her look more trim, in the absence of the foretopmast;

and it proved a fair measure of precaution; for we had not proceeded far from the scene of the first accident when bump we went a second time; and this time it seemed to be of more serious consequence.

It proved fortunate for us, then, that sail had been taken off after the former accident; as, had we been going the same pace as we were then, we should have been in a pretty plight. As it was, none knew, for the moment, whether or not the ship would be totally wrecked.

For a few minutes our captain seemed actually to lose his head, for he gave an order for all the boats to be lowered. This was done, and the men all stood by, ready for the next order to embark, when our commander, recovering his wits, began to curse the men for having mistaken, as he said, his order to lower one only of the boats, for the examination of the hull of the vessel, for an order to lower the lot; and he commanded the first lieutenant and the carpenter to go to make the survey.

Meanwhile the well was sounded, and was found to have but a few inches of water, which did not appear to increase at all. Then the lieutenant and his men returned, to report all well, as far as could be ascertained. And, in fine, nothing at all seemed to be the matter, except that one small item, viz, the ship was fixed where she struck.

Whether it was a rock or not, we did not yet know; however, an hour's enforced wait was sufficient to inform us on the matter, for at the end of that time the tide, which had been on the ebb, had retreated sufficiently to reveal the presence of sand. So there we

were, on a fine sunny day, unable to proceed further until the tide arose once more, to free us from our embarrassment; – should it chance to do so then.

Before that took place, however, a sail appeared upon the horizon, and we had an understandable anxiety as to what her nationality was.

We had small prospect of her proving to be a French vessel, as they were all too few in these waters; but, on the whole, we were not anxious for one of our own countrymen to observe our plight. Nor did we want one of our British rivals to be in a position to oversee the effects of our seamanship; but it was more likely to be a British ship than one of any other nation; and, as events proved, it was such.

On came the Briton then, tacking about in what now showed well to be shoal water; and, in course of time they were near enough to observe our condition.

‘Ahoy!’ was the shout that greeted us, when she came near enough to be heard; and we were compelled to notice her proximity.

‘Ahoy!’ we hailed back; then, ‘Can we be of any assistance?’

Our captain would fain have declined all assistance but from the fear of showing an appearance of churlishness, at the cost of our national reputation for politeness; so he was compelled to admit that he would be pleased if monsieur would have the goodness to come and see.

A boat was immediately lowered from this vessel, a brig of much smaller tonnage than our *Violante*; and their captain himself came aboard. He was received with much courtesy, returning the same with as good manners.

'I don't think there can be much that's wrong,' he declared, after receiving an account of our adventures of the morning. 'You have been fortunate, sir, after a couple such bumps as you describe.'

But it seemed to us that the Briton was rather giving himself the airs of a professional expert addressing so many amateurs in the honourable craft of the sea.

He gave it as his opinion that there was nothing to be done except to await the convenience of the tide, which, in about four or five hours would automatically relieve us from our unfortunate position. So much we knew.

He offered to stand by, almost with a suggestion that if he did so we need not feel nervous about it. Needless to say our commander was emboldened to decline; when, with a very low bow the Briton took his leave, returning to his ship in the most correct manner possible.

Then the brig sailed on her course again, and we felt much happier.

Our *Violante* had, by this time, taken on a fairly heavy list; though as we knew that the tide was not far from the turn, this did not trouble us much. But what did trouble us was that, about an hour after the departure of the British ship, was the appearance, on the eastern horizon, of yet another vessel; and we were bothered by the idea that we were to have a visit from yet another Briton. In the end, however, we had to confess to ourselves that there was an alternative to that which was even more disagreeable.

The new vessel was a schooner, of no very great tonnage; and she flew the French flag. This seemed



A BOAT WAS IMMEDIATELY LOWERED, AND



THEIR CAPTAIN HIMSELF CAME ABOARD

all right, but we did not like the general look of the vessel. She seemed rather like the description of a certain schooner which we had been warned to look out for, as an undoubted pirate.

She came on, threading her way delicately amongst the sandbanks which were once more disappearing below the surface; ours being about the only one which continued to show above the surface. But it was evident that the new-comer was no stranger to the locality; for she came on, with much confidence; threading her way, quite successfully amongst the banks which we had learned, to our cost, had an existence here.

In half an hour she had got within biscuit throw of us; and, swinging round, she lay breasting the stream, and maintained her position very cleverly without dropping anchor.

She then spoke us, in our own language, giving us a certain qualified sense of security which had been rather wanting. Calling herself the *Rose Marie*, of Guadeloupe, she hailed us as a compatriot, asking, should she send a boat to help ascertain what damage, if any, we had undergone.

Our captain did not see any reason for it; however, he accepted the offer, and the *Rose Marie* got out her smallest boat, and a mate, and a man or two got in, and came in our direction.

We still had something of a list on the *Violante*, and all our ports were closed, so that we did not see much of what was happening, except that the boat made her way slowly round our vessel, making, no doubt, a very conscientious examination of her hull. Then when the officer in charge had satisfied himself as to the state

of things, he pulled a little away from the vessel, and told the captain, very civilly, that he did not think there was anything really wrong, but that his captain was willing to stand by, for an hour or two, if we thought it advisable.

Our captain, a rather rash fellow, but by no means a fool, had, by this time, made up his mind that these fellows wanted watching; though he could see no possibility of danger in their dealings. But, having surveyed the stranger, very carefully, and come to the conclusion that she might be the one vessel which we had been already warned of, he had the tompions of the guns removed and weapons loaded, one by one, so that there should be a minimum of noise, while the men were ordered to keep to quarters.

Then, in reply to the question as to whether the schooner's captain should stand by he said, indifferently, that he did not think it necessary, but that he might do so if he pleased.

The boat then returned to the schooner which had drifted a few hundred metres away from us, and was now a fair distance from the *Violante*, on the larboard quarter.

But as soon as the boat had left the side of our vessel our captain ordered a boat to be lowered, and the first lieutenant was instructed to take the stream anchor, a small anchor which can be easily transported, and fix it on the further side of the sandbank; keeping as much out of sight of the stranger, and her boat's crew, as he could, whilst he did so.

This had been done, and the boat had just got back to the *Violante*, when there was the sound of an explo-

sion astern of us, and our helmsman, who had been leaning against the useless wheel, was flung right across the deck. He was unhurt, but got up with a dazed look on his face to see what the matter was.

The wheel went round in his hands quite freely, bringing up the end of a broken chain. An explosion of gunpowder had detached it from the rudder, and another examination revealed the fact that the rudder itself was damaged. The scoundrels who had pretended to assist us had merely taken advantage of the situation to render the helm useless, and to put us, apparently, at their mercy.

A noise of laughter from the decks of the schooner told us plainly, if we had required any further information, that the 'accident' was the contrivance of our pretended assistants. And soon a megaphone came into operation; and the principal scoundrel called to us, overseas, asking if we still required any assistance; as he was still willing to give us any in his power; but adding that the matter had become rather more difficult; and he should require the immediate delivery of all our money and valuables before he saw his way to concede anything further.

Meantime, however, the tide had been slowly rising, and our vessel had come almost to an even keel. Also, everything on the gun deck had been made ready to give a suitable reply to this insolent address, whenever the event proved practicable. All the men were warned not to stir an inch from the guns; though these seemed to be of not the slightest use, under the circumstances.

The chain cable had been let out, at the bows, inch by inch, as silently as possible. Then the end of it had

been disconnected with the capstan, and was freshly fixed to a hawser astern; and with that our captain seemed to be fully assured that our turn was yet to come.

The schooner had come a little closer while the talk went on between the rival commanders; but she had significantly kept astern. I could not imagine, from a consideration of our captain's manœuvres, what he expected to come of it; but I had an idea that he knew. I thought, indeed, that he was expecting the schooner to come within range; relying, rather too innocently I thought, upon the possibility of her presenting a broadside to us; which I did not quite see her doing. As we carried no stern guns, we could have carried on but an unequal fight, had the schooner *not* chosen to fall into a very open trap. But, as things were, there was not the slightest reason to expect anything of the sort; as she had all the advantage of position; and if she did fall into any mistake, she had the tide against her bows, ready to correct the mishap.

Yet our commander seemed very confident of some such result. And, in the meantime, the tide had arisen sufficiently to right the *Violante*, and we were on an even keel once more.

Then the captain looked down on to the gun deck, for a moment.

'Are you ready there, lieutenant?' he asked.

'Aye aye, sir,' was the reply.

'Well, remember, just one steady shot, and don't hurry. We can smash that fool without any worry; but let the first shot do it. Don't open a port till you get the word. Then fire as soon as you get sight of her. Now tell the men.'

The captain then retreated to the quarter-deck, and the first-lieutenant explained to the wondering men exactly what was expected to come about.

The schooner was expecting to be able to keep her station astern of us, as we had no helm to use; and she had us apparently at her mercy. But the little surprise that the captain had arranged for her would alter all that. As soon as our ship had run out to the length of her cable, she would be caught by the anchor astern, and would begin to swing round. She would then show the schooner a broadside of heavy guns that would be sufficient to blow that small craft out of the water, before her crew could realize what had happened.

We now understood, and needless to say, there was some excitement aboard the *Violante*.

The schooner had approached us much nearer than at her first coming. It was evident that her crew's confidence had increased. She was now little more than a hundred metres away, and was presenting a tempting target, which it would have hardly been possible to miss. Our armament was much heavier than her own; but no doubt her crew were well satisfied that we were in no position to bring our guns to bear upon them. From their point of view, we had no chance whatever.

But we were afloat once more, and though drifting helplessly on the tide, there was, every now and then, a gentle tug that told us that something was happening.

In a few minutes there was a sudden change in the aspect of affairs, which was visible to the crews of both vessels.

The ship had begun to swing about, held by the tightening hawser astern, her bows being thrown round

by the current. Then it was time for the crew of the schooner to receive a shock.

Word came from the upper deck.

'Ready, lieutenant?' was the query.

'Aye aye, sir,' the reply.

'Run out the guns.'

That was all the order we received, for the ports



were now suddenly opened, and through them we saw the schooner, now advanced so closely that we could have heaved a shot aboard. And they saw us.

Their ports were also open, but they had not thought it would be necessary to use them, and they were caught unprepared. Through them we saw the sudden commotion that took place on board. It was as though they had realized, in a moment, that they had drifted into a trap, instead of coaxing us into one; and that all their fine plans were to miscarry. Which was exactly the case, for, in less than two minutes from the time

that our vessel had begun to swing over, this unprovoked contest had been decided in our favour.

Before they had made up their minds whether to fight or to run, we had given them a broadside that administered such a tremendous shock that she heeled over to the fiery blast. Then rolling over again, she shipped such a tremendous volume of water, through the gaps our guns had made, that her decks were flooded. Many of her men had been washed overboard, through the gaps, before she righted; whilst her main-



mast toppled slowly down, coming to the deck, by degrees, as the wind completed the destruction that the guns had begun.

We had no time for a second broadside, though it did not appear that one would be necessary. What between the wreck of her mast, and the loss of many men, it was evident that all discipline had gone by the board; and that all that those who were left wanted to think about was how to get themselves safely away from the scene of this surprise.

In short, the victory was ours.



Chapter 19

WE were now masters of our own fates once more; for if we had had any doubts about it, they would have been quickly dispelled by our seeing the scoundrels taking to their boats, evidently not caring for to wait for us to take to ours, so that we might go to take possession of their craft, and of themselves along with it.

This was conclusive enough, for, helpless though we were, having no helm with which to steer the ship, we were still at anchor, and could attend to the repairs, at leisure. This gave us opportunity to secure the schooner; as for the scamps who manned her, our captain thought that, as they were of so little value in themselves he might as well let them go.

Consequently he had a couple of boats manned, and putting them under the command of the first-lieutenant and myself, we went to secure our prize; carrying a hawser with us, intending, as soon as the repairs of the *Violante* were finished, to tow the other into port.

We made our way aboard, and having first anchored her, we turned our attention to the state of things aboard.

We found that the retreating scamps had left many of their wounded behind them, in their haste to get away. Some of these were evidently quite beyond recovery; but the others we attended to, as well as we could, from the natural promptings of humanity, though we could see little good to come to them from our attentions, as they were destined, we thought, to be hanged at the nearest port at which we might touch; for all nations were willing enough to put an end to such reckless marauders.

Having done what we could in that way, however, we next gave some attention to the matter of fitting the prize for a voyage; and, fitting up a jury-mast of the remains of the mainmast, we soon found that the vessel would be able to sail under her own canvas, if circumstances dictated such a course. The matter of the repairs to our own ship were also seen to, as well as could be, on the high seas; for we should have to go into dry dock before we were quite secure of our helm again, the chains having been blown completely off by the explosion of gunpowder; and though we managed to fasten strong ropes in their place, it was not to be expected that they would prove a very lasting job. However, for the time being we might expect them to hold.

Whilst we were thus occupied, it was now very much

to our satisfaction that the English vessel of the morning should again come our way; whether or not to see if we were still in the same unfortunate position as then, we could not know; but at any rate they saw what had happened in the time they were absent; and they also saw, what did not please them very much I suspect; namely that the vessel which we had been fortunate enough to capture was none other than the very one which they, and many other small ships of their navy, were in search of. It had been marked down as their prey; but, as will happen, at times, something had gone awry with the programme; and we had 'picked her up' instead.

The captain came aboard us, once again, and hearing our commander's tale, he was forced to commend our good fortune; and the clever manœuvring that had effected it. He was good enough to say that we had come off very well indeed, especially under the circumstances in which the capture had been effected; as the schooner we had taken was one which had earned a great name for the success of her audacious enterprises.

Hearing, however, that our commander did not think he was in a position to pursue the boats which had made off, the young English officer immediately decided that it was part of his duty to repair the omission; and he departed upon that errand, leaving us with a comfortable sense of having scored off him.

It being our first-lieutenant's lot to take command of the prize he went aboard her, whilst I returned to the *Violante*; in which, after a two days' voyage, we landed at a French West Indian port, where the ship was put

into dry dock, to have the rudder repaired, or rather, a new one substituted; and this left us with a little time on our hands.

Our prize had had instructions to follow in our wake, to the same port; but she seemed to be very slow in doing so; for nearly a week elapsed, and still there was no sign of her. This troubled our captain, as he was very anxious indeed to make a safe delivery of our prize, this being his first achievement of the kind. When we had left the schooner, indeed, she had seemed in even better trim than our own craft; but, as day after day wore on, still without any signs of her, we began to think that some mischief must have overtaken her.†

The damage from our guns had certainly been great, and it was just possible that there had been some damage done below the water-line which, not betraying itself just at the moment, might have come to notice afterwards; perhaps resulting in a serious leak. This spoke ominously for the safety of the first-lieutenant and the dozen of men in his charge; for the rascals had taken the only boats she possessed when they had made good their retreat. Chafed with waiting then for his own vessel to be repaired, our captain hired two armed cutters; and giving me charge of one, and taking the other himself, we both took to the sea again, in order to see what had become of the *Rose Marie*.

It was my luck to find her first; for I had scarcely been at sea more than half a day, when I saw a vessel to the south-west of us, which I had no difficulty in identifying as our prize; though her course did not appear to be the one which our captain had recommended to her commander.

She was labouring, under a few sails, in a southerly direction; and, in the course of a few more hours, she would have fetched up on the mainland of South America. I signalled her, as soon as she hove in sight, but getting no answer, I immediately altered the course of my vessel, and made towards her, with all the speed I could muster.

I was surprised, then, to find that she also altered her own course; and, puzzled to know what this might mean, I put on more sail, and, as a precaution, had the guns (four in all) charged in readiness to meet any surprise that would explain this unlooked-for conduct on her part; which seemed inexplicable to me, unless there had been some mishap to the crew we had left behind us; or they had, at any rate, some different commander.

This proved to be the case, for, on coming up to her, I commanded the fellow at the helm to put it hard up, or I would fire into his vessel. Then a big man showed himself on the deck; a fellow wearing a bandage round his head which I had had the honour of placing there myself; and he, looking about him at the horizon on every side; drew a pistol from his belt; with the intention, I naturally thought, of shooting me; but, instead, he turned it on himself, deliberately blowing out his own brains; and toppling over the side of the schooner, into the sea.

This afterwards proved to have been the principal villain of the drama that we had taken part in a few days before. Having been wounded in the original encounter, he had been promptly abandoned by his men and, with the other wounded, left to shift for himself. However, he was a man of resource; and, instead

of giving up all hope, he had lain low; and making a show of being more damaged than he really was, he had seen his way, whilst our prize crew had been occupied in the depths of the schooner in locating the leak, which *had* happened, and begun to threaten serious consequences; he had boxed them in below; and killing our unfortunate first-lieutenant, had put a little spirit into his own wounded men; and prevailed upon them to attempt their own salvation.

And in this they had very nearly succeeded, for, in but a few hours, they would have been able to beach the vessel, somewhere on the mainland; and would, no doubt, have made their escape altogether. Our captain's foresight, and my own luck in coming upon them so soon, had forestalled this, however, and resulted in our retaking the schooner.

Boarding them, then, with a certain amount of care, for there were still a number of the original rascals left, though, wounded as they were, and having just lost their commander in the dramatic way described, they did nothing further to help themselves out of their doubtful position. They told me, quite passively, what had been their intentions; and how far they had managed to put them into execution. The remainder of our own men were still below, and out of harm's way, the schooner's fellows having no incentive to put themselves in danger by attacking them, so long as they could be kept under hatches. And we found that this was the case, only our poor first-lieutenant having had to pay the price of a loose watch over his apparently helpless prisoners.

My orders had been to rejoin my captain at the spot

where we had originally left the prize, he expecting to find that she had run foul of another of those sandbanks. I decided, however, that I ought first to make sure of the safe arrival in port of the schooner whose possession was so valued by our commander; accordingly I set a course in that direction, arriving there early in the morning of the next day; and seeing her carefully bestowed, immediately set sail again for my rendezvous.

I found this in a couple of days, receiving a reprimand from the captain, for my late-coming, which, however, was turned to compliment when I told him what had been the cause of our delay.

Then, having no further business in those waters, we immediately turned back to the port; I following in my captain's wake, taking the utmost care not to out-sail him; which I could easily have done, as he had no experience in the smaller type of vessel. However, I took care not to let him see that I was a good deal his superior in the handling of this type of vessel; and he was good enough to express his sense of my abilities in handling a small craft; so I was satisfied.

My meekness, however, did not procure me the vacant post of first-lieutenant; but I hardly expected that it would, as I was still too young, and there were many on the West Indies station waiting for some such opening. However, I was acting first-luff, and for a month or two I enjoyed the authority of that position a good deal; taking the opportunity to become as well acquainted with its duties, as well as its privileges, as I could; always with a view to being ready to assume the post whenever the chance came my way.

Then with a prize to our credit, for the captain was so unwilling to leave this precious sign of his prowess behind him that he actually waited until the schooner was put in a sufficient trim to follow in our wake, we set forth to complete our voyage; and afterwards went to rendezvous of our fleet.

This we found cruising off the mouth of the great Mississippi; and, rejoining, we found ourselves well, if enviously, received, as having added a little to the reviving glory of the French Navy; and, of course, there was promotion for my commander, and felicitations for myself.

I might have expected more out of the business had my captain been a rich man instead of a poor one; however I expected to handle a fair sum in prize money, as well as a share in the substantial present made us by some of the rich merchants of the West Indies; who had special reasons to be pleased that this particular enemy of their craft had been disposed of.

In fact, we found that we had been exceptionally favoured by Providence when we had been so unfortunately (as we had thought) cast away upon that sand-bank; thus exposing ourselves to the attentions of the craftiest of the marauders of ocean trade who had been to the fore for many years.

Also we had the additional satisfaction of knowing that we had quite dished our British rivals; for they had quite looked upon the capture of this particular pirate as their own affair, entirely; and they had even had a sort of competition amongst themselves as to which of them should have the honour of taking the vessel.

Chapter 20

OUR business in the West Indies was political, and was confined to demonstrating to our colonials there the fact that France was still a power on the ocean; which fact there had been plenty of reason to think might easily be overlooked. Indeed, it was the last demonstration but the one immediately preceding the terrible destruction of our ships at Trafalgar that the French in that quarter were to have the chance to see for many a long year.

Whether it was successful or not, I will not presume to decide, but it was not long after that that Napoleon got rid of our possessions on the mainland of North America, those great colonies which had been the envy and admiration of both the British and their descendants of the United States for many a long year, over two centuries, in fact.

Possibly our great Consul, and Emperor-to-be, did a good stroke of business when he sold the last bit of our ancient colonial empire of the mainland to our old allies of the States, instead of leaving them to the mercy of our enemies; but most Frenchmen have deplored the fact that the last piece of our ancient glory had to go. For it had been the greatest overseas development of our countrymen, this arduous conquest of the great western land, which had made the Mississippi and the Missouri largely French rivers. It was our explorers and missionaries who, commencing at the mouth of the Saint Lawrence, and crossing those vast lakes of North America, had continued, in the face of the most capable savage tribes of people in

the world, and pushed the van of civilization right down to the Gulf of Mexico, thus reclaiming for civilization one of the fairest portions of the globe. And we were to lose it all. However, it was scarcely as much as a legend to me at that time, for we had been so much shut up in Europe, and so much occupied in carving out kingdoms there, spreading French culture in the old and rotting principalities in the Old World, that it was little wonder that only aged persons recollected, just then, that there was a France overseas that, under proper cultivation, would have added glories to our name that even our great conquests on the continent of Europe could never hope to do. And when young France woke up to the facts, it was too late to retrieve the disaster. That great Far-West was gone from us for ever.

And Napoleon himself, and all his conquests were to disappear, and to leave all that epoch to be summed up under one illusive name, – The Revolution.

Just as though nothing had happened except the destroying of a couple of old prisons, and the freeing of their victims, and the temporary supersession of an ancient dynasty. – But – after that – Modern Europe, with my beloved country as the leader in the achievement. It is not always fortunate to be the pioneer of a world-movement.

At that time, however, it was not known anywhere but in France itself what this movement was. People thought of us only as a people with a lust for conquest. They did not stop to think that it was a great human desire to conquer ignorance, and all the disability of that legacy of the Middle Ages with its feudal system

which kept down human thought and progress. But that is what it was, and it will be found so, some happy day. And then France will have her due.

So we made our progress through the West Indies, exhibiting to our countrymen there a spectacle of a new power of France arising in the sea, just where she seemed to have failed for ever; and the rest of my story is simply the private adventures of an undistinguished junior officer of the French Navy.

Shortly after our arrival back in Europe, we were ordered to our home port of Toulon; for there were already murmurings of an outbreak of hostilities between ourselves and, of course, England. Our greatest enemy had refused to evacuate Malta, which she had undertaken to do, under the Peace of Amiens; having some slight pretext, perhaps, in the fact that our own Government had not yet carried out the full provisions of the same treaty; and there were sufficient tales about the formation of a fresh coalition against us to make it a measure of precaution to keep our fleets well together. The time for the great swoop of a combined fleet upon the shores of England, which seemed to be in our Master's mind, was not yet come. There was the Boulogne camp there ready to co-operate with the fleet in the great enterprise, but the fleet itself was not ready.

This being so, I made one last effort to achieve my desire to join the land forces of our conquering Chief, and that failing again, I settled down, for good, to make the best of my position, on the sea. I was told, indeed, that my career there had given the authorities a good deal of satisfaction, and that if I were patient I

might expect promotion to a good position in a service which was only now under reconstruction, and was badly in need of experienced officers. That had to satisfy me, and, indeed, it was not a bad outlook.

Getting a little leave I went home to see what had taken place there. I found that my old, thin aunt, had got older and thinner; and that my fat cousin had got older and fatter. The latter indeed was rather monstrous, but he seemed very well satisfied in thus being a substantial citizen of the Republic, and one could not grudge him this harmless vanity. He found himself distinguished as being the biggest human being in the whole south of France; and it seemed to serve him in place of a more arduous ambition. I was glad to know, however, that it was not a family failing; and that I need not fear, personally, that I should ever compete with him in this respect.

My friend André Pierrpont had reappeared amongst us, on the exchange of prisoners that had taken place immediately on the conclusion of peace, so that he was back; but his adventures afloat had been too severe to ensure a complete recovery of his accident at the time he had smashed his ribs; and he was now compelled to give up the sea, and to serve his country in his uncle's office at the Toulon Headquarters. I was rejoiced to see him again, finding him still the same merry fellow, with the propensity to joke that had served to relieve the tedium of the many hours we had spent together in durance vile. He seemed well content however, for he had an easy berth of it, and could spend many an hour chatting with the sea-captains and naval men with whom he was now brought into contact

in his official career. So long as he was not disturbed in this I could see that he would be happy enough.

My cousin, the attorney of Paris, now turned up; and I had the opportunity of learning the precise importance of this unknown individual.

It now appeared that he was a very rich old fellow; and furthermore, he had no kin but myself; and in a minor degree, my aunt and cousin. He now told me definitely that he looked upon me as his natural heir, and if I were a credit to the family name, he would make me his actual successor. I had always meant to be a credit to the old name of the Cortés, whether I ever made wealth or not, but it did not seem any detriment that it should bring me an estate at some time when I might have a longing for a life ashore again. He wished me to go on as long as my country required me in my present position; and afterwards, he promised that, as I should probably be too old to take any sort of interest in the law that he had found so advantageous, he would buy me a ship for the overseas service, and launch me in a career as shipowner. I gave him my word that he should not be disappointed in me, but was less sanguine than he as to the possible freedom of the seas, for any such opportunity, in the immediate future. And the sequel proved that I was right.

My own reward for the services I had rendered in the matter of the pirate-ship in the West Indies, had been somewhat tardy, but I was now to reap the benefit of my adventure; being promoted to full lieutenant, with the satisfaction of knowing that I was the youngest lieutenant in the service; and was moreover promised a command if things fell out favourably in

a short time. This settled for ever my attempt to get into the army. I could not afford to let such an opportunity slip of getting a command which would put me in a more independent position than anything but the very highest rank of the land-service would do; and the possibility of reaching that was more remote than the chance of being High Admiral of the seas. I was already in the service that most needed the discovery of first-class officers, and I made up my mind to stick there, for good and all.

In due course my opportunity came for a separate command, — a small one, it is true, but one after my own heart. I was offered the choice of one of two small ships, the one a brig of some pretensions to fighting power, but a slow sailer; and the other a swift schooner, of half the number of guns, but a very fast vessel, which was used as a despatch-boat, or a scout, about equally. This vessel I thought would give me a more eventful existence than the more pretentious one, and I thought that, with it, I should both see the greater affairs of the main fleet, and also be much on my own as a messenger, travelling to different parts of the continent, if not abroad; and it would depend upon my own skill as a sailor what I made of it, whilst I should have more immediate interest in affairs generally.

My position being confirmed then I received my first commission, which took me many times around the Peninsula of Spain and Portugal, and once or twice farther afield. But always there were rumours of a renewal of the war with our great enemy of the seas, and I never knew, whenever I set out on a trip, whether or not before I reached my destination, there would

be open and declared war to intercept me on my missions.

And one day, it fell out just like that.

I was journeying from Toulon to Brest, more, I believe, to give my shipload of new sailors a chance to acquire sea-legs, than to serve any other particular purpose, though, as usual, we carried despatches. However, I was wary, as usual; and though I made it a point to get as near to our friends the British as was safe, in order to get an idea of their dispositions at any particular time, which was always important for us to know, I always avoided any appearance of a trap.

Also, I kept my crews in a state of preparedness for a fight.

My second was a somewhat indolent young fellow, full of pluck, and a good sailor, but he seemed to have the idea that fighting came by nature; and that anything French was sure to conquer an enemy, if there was any comparison at all between them. I assured him of his mistake; and drilled him, and caused him to drill his crew, until from being a too-fat young man, he came to be in much better fighting trim than he had ever expected, I believe; and he even developed a strong desire to be at the enemy, in order to 'pick up' some good prizes. However, at the present, there was no enemy; and he had to be content with my private assurance that there might be an opportunity arriving at any moment.

Well, I had the satisfaction of getting my men also into such good trim that I felt I had no reason to fear anything that might be put into the field (if I could

describe it as such) on anything like equal terms, against us; and I was content to carry on, in that state.

Well, the Peace of Amiens had scarcely been in being for fifteen months when there were new pretexts found, by our industrious enemy, for a new war; and at it we went again pell-mell.

As I expected, the outbreak found me at sea, and the first idea I had of it was in being chased by a couple of the enemy frigates, when within touch of Gibraltar.

It was evening when we drew near the great rock, against both wind and tide; and had the enemy caught sight of us, but a half-hour sooner, they would have had little difficulty in picking up my small craft. However, I had crept close in, to see what I could of affairs in the Bay, when seeing these two large vessels setting out, and not liking to find myself quite so near their lair, I stood across the Straits, a turn of the helm throwing them both alee, and I thought that their own behaviour would give me a clue as to that vexed question – Were we at war again, or not?

Hugging the Moroccan coast, I had the satisfaction, or otherwise, of seeing the question solved in favour of war.

There was no doubt as to the intentions of the enemy, and, no doubt, they had thought the matter was soon to end in their picking up a fine little craft to add to their own fleet; but they had to be disappointed.

The wind being rather across our bows, and light, I had the advantage of them; though there was scarcely as much distance between us as I should have liked, and there did not seem much chance of increasing our advantage until we got through the Straits.

For some reason or other they did not fire upon us. Perhaps they had some idea that we had not received the news as yet as to the outbreak of hostilities; which was true; but at an early part of the chase, a shot might have put an end to the race; for our small guns would not reach half the distance; and I was glad that they evidently thought they were to outsail us, when they might simply scoop us up without any intimation to any other vessel of ours, which might be in the vicinity, as to the position of affairs; and so add to their possible acquisitions that way.

However, they made a miscalculation in that; and we soon forced them to declare themselves; for after half an hour's chase, they fired a shot which went right over my schooner, and dropped some way ahead. It was War.

They were still too far distant for any shot of ours to take effect, but I decided that it would have a good effect on my untried crew if I permitted them to reply, and I did so, finding that my marksmen shot straight enough, though to no effect, as the guns were too weak to carry the distance. However, this slight touch cheered the men, causing them to express a wish that they might get involved in a real battle soon.

I had to give all my attention to the matter of getting safely away though, as it was out of the question for my small schooner to take on two such relatively large ships as fifty-gun frigates; so I had the ports closed, and all made snug for any increase of wind we might find in the Atlantic.

I hugged the Moroccan coast, making as if my objective was a trip to some part of Africa, but on

emerging from the Straits, and finding that there was no more wind to be expected, I took a defiant north-westerly course, in the teeth of the slight breeze, and let my enemy trail behind as long as they chose to do so. I felt certain they could not catch us, unless things altered very much in their favour; and had the satisfaction of seeing them trying their utmost to urge their ship on, without success; and in the night we lost sight of them.

Next morning found us subjected to a similar experience. A smaller specimen of the enemy, this time, tried to intercept us, off the mouth of the Tagus; and had I not been warned by the chase at Gibraltar, I might have had to fight a way out of this trap. However, I gave them a clear berth, and finding that we had the sea-legs of them, I afterwards disdained to fetch more sea way, and instead, cut across the enemy's course, so that she could not take the news of our approach to any of her compatriots that might chance to stand in our way northwards.

We had some excitement for a few hours, then, tackling about on our enemy's course, and not always out of range of her guns, however, we managed so well, that my men were getting increased confidence from the experience, and that would do them no harm.

We were of service, too, in warning several vessels of French nationality of the state of affairs, including a brig of war, which was the very one which I had had the choice of commanding, some months earlier; and which I was now doubly glad I had missed. For it might easily have chanced that I should have been making the same voyage as this more pretentious vessel,

in the same ignorance of the outbreak of hostilities, and maybe, with no artful commander of a schooner near, able to dodge his enemies and give me the needed warning. But it fell out all right for the brig; for being a slower sailer, she was now warned to alter her course, and to keep right out of the danger zone, which my gallant ship was able to negotiate with ease and a certain security.

I could not stay my course, however, for the sake of a fancied security of a vessel of greater tonnage, as my mission was definite; and, recommending my junior to take control of the merchant-vessels that had collected round us, I left him to pursue his own course, whilst I kept as straight as circumstances would let me for Boulogne; where whispers were beginning to arise of a great camp in process of formation, for the conquest of England.

Here I made a wide detour north, and gaining a point of vantage, swooped down under cover of the darkness and gained the bay in the face of our many enemies who had assembled to inquire into the meaning of the warlike preparations going on there.



Chapter 21

HERE my sea adventures did, for a time, come to an end; for though I had been surprisingly successful in getting into Boulogne, I could by no means get out again.

The sea-rovers from across the Manche had us securely boxed up, their ships for ever prowling about just out of gunshot, and ready to show their teeth as soon as it appeared of any advantage to them. And there we were, my vessel and a few others, being put to use in the training of the men who were designed to take the part of convoying the great French army across the waters dividing us from Britain, and thus settling the pretensions of the Islanders to rule the actions and policy of France, for ever.

It has been said, since, that it was never the policy of our great leader to invade England at all; and that these preparations were a blind in order to mask his real intentions for getting a great army together for the very purpose to which it was put eventually; namely for the invasion of Austria, and the hurling back of the Russian forces again into their own wilds.

That, of course, is the secret of the one man, now passed away, Napoleon himself. He may have had some such idea at the back of his mind; but it was always my own private opinion that his intentions were what they appeared to be on the surface, namely to conquer England. No one can deny what a serious view he took of that power. It always seemed to stand in his way, whatever project his mighty mind conceived, and whatever faults or virtues he possessed

Napoleon never had but the one idea at the back of all his efforts, and that was to tackle the biggest job he could find, and disregard the little ones, until that had been attended to. And there is no doubt as to what that biggest job was; – the elimination of England from the powers of Europe. After that there was little for France to fear; for had France but gained the freedom of the seas again, and been able to control the commerce of the Continent, there was but the one great land-power, Russia, to consider, and there is no doubt at all but that those people could be kept ‘beyond the frontier’ even as those forebears of our Policy, the Romans, had kept their Goths back; and a peace like to that of the Pax Romana, would have descended on to a ravaged continent to bless mankind for perhaps as many centuries as did the Roman power in its day. However, it was not to be, for England was never conquered.

Yet that that was the idea of our Emperor I was never in doubt, for it was worthy of him; and well would it have been had it been realized, both for us and the rest of the world. And when it at last appeared that it would never come about; – when the news came to Boulogne that Admiral Villeneuve had failed to carry out our master’s orders, and, at all costs, joined forces with the ships and flotillas at Boulogne, so as to make the descent on the chalk hills of the coveted land opposite, Napoleon broke out into an awful rage; and expressed his own mind in saying: ‘What a navy! What an admiral!’ It spoke volumes to all of us. All his preparations for years seemed to go awry all at once, and it was the navy that had failed him.

However, I was watching my great hero's efforts with a good deal of alarm, as well as admiration, and long before the effort was abandoned, I had come to the conclusion that only a miracle could save the army, once it had launched its fortunes on the waves. I was nearer to the secrets of the sea than himself, and as the preparations went on, and I watched the training of the men, and the accumulation of the rafts that were to ferry the great French army across the waters I worked out the problem on paper in the quiet of my own cabin, when the day's work was over, and came to the conclusion that all was doomed to failure; and it was a real relief to me when at last it appeared that the attempt was to be abandoned.

I could see that, whether the army was safely landed or not, nothing could save the fleet that convoyed him; and that his communications would be instantly destroyed. And though I believe that Napoleon himself contemplated that event with a good deal of calm, I thought of that other affair, in far-off Egypt, when his communications had been demolished in precisely the same manner; and I conjectured that the great man had made the mistake of over-confidence in his working of miracles; and that the result would have been even worse than in the former case. Behind the seas we knew not what power lay with the English.

No! Napoleon should have continued a few more years, in patience, building up a power on the waters sufficient to put our enemy on the defensive; and who knows what might have come of it. As it was, there was Trafalgar fought under an Admiral perplexed by the constant interference from his home authorities;

and when it came, at last, to a trial of strength on the land, Waterloo stood in the way. The French ideal was at an end.

On my first coming to Boulogne I had had an interview with the great Napoleon, who, to my surprise, recognized me as the 'very young lieutenant' he had met in Toulon, so many years before. He remembered both my name, and the time we had met, Brumaire 1799, also the few words that had passed between us. Commenting on this episode he said that he had not forgotten that he had wished me to be ready to go to him if called upon at any time, but that as I was not in the land service he had found less reason to so call on me. This showed me what a mistake I had made at that time, in not having asked for his influence in making an exchange that was so near my own heart. However, I thought that it was not the time now to think of any such idea, as I was in something of a position now, and might not have such opportunities in the army, where there was no want of rising men; whilst in the navy there was a dearth of good officers; and men of ambition did not seem to take to that service at all readily. I was really better off where I was.

However, the great man found me so much to do for him locally that there I had to stick until I almost feared that I should lose touch with the practical side of sea life. But in the end the message came to me that Napoleon had found that special mission for me which he had said would come at some time.

A message came for 'Captain' Cortés to proceed immediately to headquarters, and as this was the first intimation that Lieutenant Cortés had had of the

change in his rank, he instantly pressed the young officer who had brought the command to accept his gold watch as a souvenir of the event.

I proceeded then to headquarters, and there had a short, but momentous interview with my admired Chieftain, receiving an independent commission from him.

The great man then asked me, did I think I could get to Ireland. The only difficulty being the getting out of Boulogne, I instantly said that I could. He thereupon told me that he had important despatches for delivery to some person there, and that time was also a great item to be considered. They were to be delivered at a certain hour, of a certain day, and must by no means be there after that time. This was not so easy a proposition, but I undertook it, thinking it was my opportunity; and that if I had only the luck to accomplish it, I was a made man.

He then offered me a choice of ships, also of any port which I chose to sail from, on the western side of the country, as it was less likely that I could take advantage of any of the fine vessels that had been accumulated in Toulon, as the English were never far away from that port, besides the difficulty of passing the Straits of Gibraltar.

However, I told him that the only ship I needed was the one I had had command of for some time, which, if I had the same crew, would give me the best opportunity I could have of attaining my object. The weather was inclined to be foggy just now, and with fog there was rarely much wind, in which case I felt that my ship was safe from any of the enemy's frigates;

and I could almost choose my path through them. I also said that I had trained my men with a good deal of rigour, so that they might be able to meet any ship of anything like the same weight with a decent prospect of success. He was much pleased with this, saying that if I came through all right he would see to it that I should have a command worthy of my efforts, as the spirit I was bringing to affairs was just what he had anxiously sought in his navy.

I was given my commission, and was left to my own plans as to the event of departure; even Napoleon himself being willing to listen to them without making the smallest suggestion of alteration, which, I think, would be about a record in his dealings with any of his servants.¹

My task was the apparently simple one of conveying papers to a spot in the north-west of Ireland; and the time allowed me was the substantial one of twenty-nine days. I was there to find an Irish fishing-lugger, which went by the name of *Holy Isle*, there to deliver my papers, and to await off and on the coast until the same vessel which in those times fished for some very queer prey indeed, brought me despatches for my Emperor. This was to be delivered at my own discretion, either to the Admiral Villeneuve, with his grand fleet, or if it proved impossible to find him, I was to choose some port of Spain, in preference to one of our own ports, which would be more difficult of attainment (and it was esteemed almost impossible that I could regain Boulogne, in the present state of things); and there delivering my care to the French consul of the place, together with a written paper of instruction

from the Emperor to show the importance of the affair, to await there until I had some reply, which would give me further instructions.

Well, this was an easy enough plan to follow, except for the one small consideration that I should be surrounded everywhere by our unsleeping enemy. I had to run the gauntlet of the British ships, in their own waters, which made the commission sufficiently hazardous, and therefore important to me to accomplish it. It was my chance.

My request to have my own trained crew returned to me from their land occupations was, of course, acceded to; and with these, and a ship under me which I had never ceased to keep in sailing trim, ready for anything that might turn up, I felt that I was at least as well equipped as with any larger ship, of greater fighting powers, with whose sailing I was totally unacquainted. I was not meant to fight on this journey, at any rate. All that was required of me was to find my way across the seas, and to deliver my message. And this I was determined to do if it lay within my power.

Before three o'clock that same afternoon, I had collected all my own men, and provisioned my ship with as much as would be required if I were to find myself out of touch with any of our own ports for a good three months; and, being thus ready, merely awaited the time of day or night when affairs would be in trim for my escape from the beleaguered port.

I had only a few hours to wait, indeed, for there was a good deal of fog off the coast, and towards evening it seemed to me that that same night would see me

started on my momentous journey. A mist came on, during the evening hours, and in a little time it settled into a deep fog, with rather less of wind than I cared for, however, but I was determined not to wait for any ideal sort of starting; so as soon as it seemed dark enough, so that I could but see a few fathoms ahead, and having all my sails ready set, I got up the anchor, and set out of the port.

Outside there was a little more breeze to be met, and at first hugging the shore, I made a course to the north-east, and no doubt passing many of the enemy ships quite close to, I went ahead.

My idea was to run right round the enemy country, for I had time to take this course, and it seemed to me to be the safer one. The English had little concern at that time to be watching their own coast and the only ships, except merchant-vessels, I expected to meet would be supply ships, not very heavily armed maybe; and some other vessels of war patrolling the coasts, or proceeding to join their respective fleets. These I had to expect, in any case, whichever course I took; but the main danger was the coming into contact with the fleets that were engaged in blockading Boulogne, or Brest, on the northern shores of France; whose frigates and smaller vessels would be on the *qui vive* in the vicinity of the fleets they served.

On the other side of the map there would be the British fleet that was engaged in blockading, more or less effectively, the Dutch coast; but once past these, I apprehended that I should have little difficulty in slipping into the North Sea, and gaining my objective by a journey right round the coast of Scotland.

After which it was a mere matter of good luck in the way of favourable weather, for I knew I had to expect anything from the stormy seas that were to be met anywhere in the vicinity of that part of the Atlantic. However I felt that as far as sailing went I was as likely to survive the ordeal as any of my rivals.

The only thrill we experienced at the outset was one which turned out very amusingly at the finish, though it bade fair to stop our progress at the very start.

We were scarcely an hour out from our anchorage before we very nearly collided with a vessel that was at anchor, and which proved to be one of our enemy, as of course, there were none else to be found so near to the French coast at that time.

'Hello, *Bacchante*! What the devil are you doing here?' inquired an English voice, as we scraped the sides of a small cutter just to leeward of us.

Fortunately I was on deck, and hearing the voice speaking in English, I immediately replied in the same strange tongue, and using the familiar, jocose style of address, to which I had been well accustomed when I had learned the language from my friend John Fogarthy, I replied, 'Oh, fishing!' in a tone of complete nonchalance.

I was puzzled at the time at hearing the call, for I did not know then that the English had a vessel of the same name, and that it was, by an extraordinary coincidence, a schooner of about the same tonnage. I thought it was a manifestation of the British way of hailing a desirable enemy before proceeding to sterner measures of showing their interest.

'Ahoy!' came the voice again, to which I replied with a laconic. 'Well!'

'Alter your course a point or two, you fathead. You'll be running the Admiral down if you keep ahead.'

'Right you are!' I replied. 'Infernal dark, ain't it?'

I flatter myself that a native of the land of fogs could not have kept up the matter better than I did, but I was glad to find that I need not continue the conversation for long, as we drifted out of hearing. I was also glad to know that I was sailing straight towards the dreaded Admiral; and my unknown friend could not have done me a greater favour than by informing me that Nelson was so near to me. However, I did not pause to take his ship, being more concerned about preserving my own, and knowing that the British Line must be spread out in blockading trim just about that spot, I went inshore again, keeping there for about an hour until I decided that I must be well past them; when again I took a northerly direction.

Next morning we had a rather exciting time as we neared the mouth of the channel, and had to negotiate the passage of the Godwins; however, we took no hurt, for there was not much shipping about; those vessels who might usually have been expected about here, coming from the Thames, having been delayed by the usual fogs in the mouth of the English river, which was enjoying a period of their favourite atmosphere; and they had not ventured forth. Before they did so, we were well past this particular danger point, and on our way into the open water of the German Ocean.

Thinking the vicinity of the English coast a very good

assurance of safety for an unsuspected French vessel, I kept as well as I could just about the point of invisibility from the land, and went on.

Once or twice, about the neighbourhood of their ports, I had to move farther out; but ever and anon I went close in again; thus shortening the journey, and reaping the benefit of the protection of our traditional enemies; for none of them expected to see a French vessel so anxious to be near them as I was; and while they were looking for the likes of us, in far distant waters, we had the pleasure of accepting their hospitality quite close to.

In much less time than I had calculated I was picking my more difficult way about the north of Scotland, and once or twice, when I thought it safe, I even ventured to show the defiance of my countrymen by flying French colours; just to let the Islanders know that we were not beaten yet. However, perhaps the thick-headed Islanders were quite unable to believe their own eyesight, as we were never challenged by any of their own vessels; though, of course, I never ventured to show the Tricolour to any of their warships. Indeed, I took care never to venture too closely to any vessel whose appearance gave me warning to expect an enemy.

Chapter 22

I WAS five days ahead of time when I arrived at about the position I was instructed to take up, on the fifty-fifth parallel, on the west coast of Ireland; and I had now to cruise about in the vicinity until such time as the *Holy Isle* should appear out of the mists, to claim my message on behalf of the rebel element in Ireland; from whom our leader apparently expected some diversion of the enemy's attention whilst he was occupied in making things difficult for them elsewhere.

I had been advised not to hug the Irish coast too closely, as our ally had not always found it easy to blind the enemy as to her real business. Also I was not to expect to find her before a certain day; but on that day, it was advisable to get into touch with her, as soon as possible. That was the sketch of my course, and I now found myself, with a good five days in hand, but otherwise ready.

I then stood out into the Atlantic, for a day's voyage; getting to windward of the selected spot, and able to swoop down upon it, at a very short notice; and there I went easy, with no enemy ship, nor indeed a ship of any nationality near to us. I had it in mind that the *Holy Isle* might well be indulging in the same tactics; as with the prevailing winds on that part of the ocean, it was always more feasible to arrange a time of meeting when the wind was in a vessel's favour, than otherwise; and I thought that if the skipper of the *Holy Isle* had any immediate fear of interference from the British Navy, he might be himself compelled to use the same idea.

As the time approached, however, I grew anxious. I wanted to make the connection as near to the appointed time as I could, neither being late nor early; and as the time grew nearer, this seemed to me to be asking a good deal.

One morning, a couple of days before the appointed time, I was vexed by the appearance of a strange vessel, of rather larger tonnage than my own, which appeared in the vicinity; and which was acting as though she might have the same views as ourselves. I sighted her plainly, and could not but think that she must have sighted me; and being so nearly in touch with British waters, I felt it somewhat strange that we should not be challenged to show our nationality. However I had to put it down to some sleepiness on the part of her watch; for she simply kept on her westward course, taking no notice whatever of us.

As we were also making a westerly direction, I thought it would not do to show any such concern at the appearance of this stranger as to change our course; so merely slackening sheets, I let her get well out of sight; when, tacking again, I crossed her course, and got to the south of her; and again turned west.

I thought I might well have engaged her had there been any reason for doing so; but my business was not the acquisition of any enemy vessel, with the prestige that would accrue to it. I was definitely engaged in a certain business, which must not be risked for any other consideration. Therefore I stuck to the matter in hand, and let her go.

And we saw no more of her; – for the time being. Next morning I crept cautiously back to our old

position, and thenceforward had but one idea in my mind, which was to arrive at my appointed station, on the fifty-fifth parallel, at a distance of about two hundred miles to the west of Ireland; and at midday, I had the satisfaction of finding that I was as near to that position as made no matter. It was now up to the *Holy Isle* to be equally exact.

The next twenty-four hours was a period of much anxiety for me. None of my men, of course, knew anything of our mission except the bare plan of meeting, somewhere on the high seas, a vessel that would relieve us of our message, and end our immediate responsibility. The whole thing rested on my shoulders.

At twelve, midday, on the memorable 9th of June, then, I took the sun, and had the satisfaction of finding that we were almost exactly at the appointed spot; and also that, approaching us, was a small fishing lugger, of the sort that I was advised of. She was approaching us at a good pace; and half an hour showed her to be the very one we were in search of.

I began to congratulate myself that my mission had been successfully accomplished.

But at the very moment of recognition I was alarmed by the warning of a sail to windward; and hastening up to the masthead, to get a certain view of her, I was dismayed to find that the new-comer was the same vessel which, a couple of mornings before, had caused me some uneasiness by the inexplicability of her movements. In an instant I came to the conclusion that we were simply sailing into a trap.

Slipping down to the deck again, I gave a brief order to my second in command, an order he was well

prepared for, namely, to load all our guns, behind the closed ports, and wait. Then I set myself to think the matter out, as quickly as I could.

A few days before I had indulged in a train of thought as to what I might do, in case things did not turn out quite as well as they ought to do; and I had painfully prepared a duplicate set of papers; sealed with the seal which I had the audacity to remove from the actual despatches I had been entrusted with; and these, I thought, might do very well for the enemy to make a capture of, in case anything did go wrong with the mission I had undertaken. – That was one part of my idea.

And now I felt that I was in a trap, along with our friends of the fishing lugger; and I had to make up my mind as to how I might operate so that all came out well in the end.

I thought that, with the superior speed of my gallant little craft, I might easily expect to get clear away from the enemy; but I wanted to do much more than that. It was my desire to protect the object of my mission, and to deliver the message I had been entrusted with, whether my fears as to the attitude of the strange vessel approaching us were correct or not. But I felt that it would not do for me to hand over my important papers tamely to the captain of the lugger, for him to have to give them up immediately to the commander of the vessel, whose business seemed so closely connected with our own. So I cast about what to do.

The false despatches I had prepared were an imposing-looking document now securely locked in a safe in my cabin. The real missive, a relatively insigni-

ficant-looking sort of affair, was reposing in my breast pocket. How to protect this latter, without destroying it, I was puzzled to know.

Now, one of my crew was a very unusual sort of fellow, of what precise nationality I do not know. I believe he was a Jew, and therefore, as I might say, of no nationality in particular.

He was supposed to be half-witted; and he certainly looked it. He was an insignificant-looking man, none too clean, and of a shrunken, warped figure, but what was strange, a very handsome face. He had a fine ruddy colour in his cheeks, which contrasted strangely with the feebleness of his body; with a full beard of the blackest hue; but an expression of dullness on his face that was beyond all imagining. I believe, however, that he had been a slave in Algiers; and that, in that capacity, he had had experiences of ill-usage that had made such a mark on him that there was no effacing it.

And, of course, he was the butt of the crew;—he could not escape that. Seamen are a rough set of fellows, and their favourite butt is bound to be some weakling amongst them. Emmanuel seemed that sort of man, so he had to suffer.

Yet, strangely enough, Emmanuel, for all his looks, was no weakling; he was simply the toughest specimen amongst them; though the near-sighted fellows never found that out. But he never resented the treatment to which he was subjected; and, indeed, seemed quite unconscious of it; and so little affected by it, that it would have been a useless expenditure of energy to rebuke them for baiting the fellow. He seemed to live

a life entirely his own; and for all anyone else mattered, they might have been another, and perhaps an inferior class of animal. As a sailor, or a ship's boy, or whatever he might be roughly classed, Emmanuel's business was to do just what no one else seemed to care to do; and he did it, without a word.

Now, just at the time that it seemed to me that I required the help of some person whose insignificant appearance would appear to put him out of all count as one likely to be used for a confidential service and of such an important character, my eyes fell upon Emmanuel; and I was taken by a sudden inspiration. I called him to me.

I had no time to think it over, however, it was not necessary. If ever I had a stroke of genius granted to me, that was it.

'Emmanuel,' I said to him, 'I have you in mind as perhaps the most trustworthy person on this ship for a position of confidence. What do you think of it?'

For a moment the man looked startled; and his face bore an expression that one might never have expected to see there. It was an expression of intelligence.

I might have been surprised at this, but, just at that moment, I felt that I was not to be surprised at anything of the sort. It was as though I had, all along, suspected just this very thing. I was sure that I had made no mistake in my choice of an assistant.

And with this look of intelligence, there was another. It seemed to be gratitude. Gratitude at being addressed like a human being; and not as a mere animal in the guise of one.

Then the expression quickly faded; but, more alert than he usually seemed, he calmly answered me:

'Yes, master,' was all he said.

'Emmanuel,' I went on, 'I am bearing despatches, which must, on no account, get into the wrong hands. I have them in my breast pocket and I wish to give them over to you, to do with them what I am likely to be prevented in doing.

'They need to be given into the possession of the captain of that fishing-lugger which is approaching us, from the east. That is my business, and it looks as though I shall be unable to complete it; for there is a fighting ship coming out of the west which looks strong enough to prevent me; and I believe is there just for the purpose of doing so.

'Now I may either lose them myself, or have to see them taken from the captain of the lugger, which is the same thing. Therefore I cannot give them up, though I wish to do so. Now I want to know, can you take them, and choosing the right moment, give them to this captain under conditions that no one is likely to be the wiser for? Emmanuel, my friend, I am asking you to do something that I cannot do myself.'

The man looked at me, for a brief moment, with the same look he had given me before. 'Yes, master!' he said, in exactly the same tone.

'Very well,' I answered. 'They are in my breast pocket. I am now going to put them in your hand. Put them away somewhere safe, and let no one know.'

'Yes, master,' he replied, a third time; so I took the paper from my pocket, and slipping it into his hand, as he stood face to face with me, I saw him take it, and

slip it under his shirt so deftly that even I, who stood immediately over him, could hardly discern his action. Then looking at me again, passively, as though awaiting my signal for his departure, I just nodded to him; and he turned away. The business was finished.

I had not known what was to come of the morning's events; but it was soon proved to me that I had been right in getting those important papers out of my possession. In a short time, things were to develop in a way entirely different from anything that I had imagined.

I had not expected, for instance, that in a very short time after I should find myself a prisoner in the hands of the English, having given up my vessel without striking a blow.

But, so it was, and this is how it came about.

The fishing-lugger came up, against the wind, but at such a fine rate, that I mentally modified my plans; seeing that it was likely that the Irish boat could make good her escape, again, once she had my important message; and then I might turn on the enemy, and, what I felt I might then indulge in, try to add to my laurels by a capture, in battle of one of the enemy fleet.

At scarcely a cable's length away, the lugger hove to, a boat was lowered, and several men got into her, and commenced to row at a pace that told of their need to get the business over quickly. That, indeed, was what I expected and desired; and if there was anything wanting to complete my satisfaction that all was yet to be well, I should have found it in this.

However, as I said, I was prepared for any sort of surprise, though I had ceased to look for one.

I slackened sheets, but kept every stitch flying in order to pick up way again at a moment's notice; and awaited, with impatience, until the boat reached us; and there clambered aboard of us the men whom I had travelled so far to meet.

They strode aft to meet me, and with a simple 'Good morning, sir. Captain O'Flaherty, of the lugger, *Holy Isle*,' the leader introduced himself as the man I awaited.

'Good morning,' I replied. 'You are expecting —'

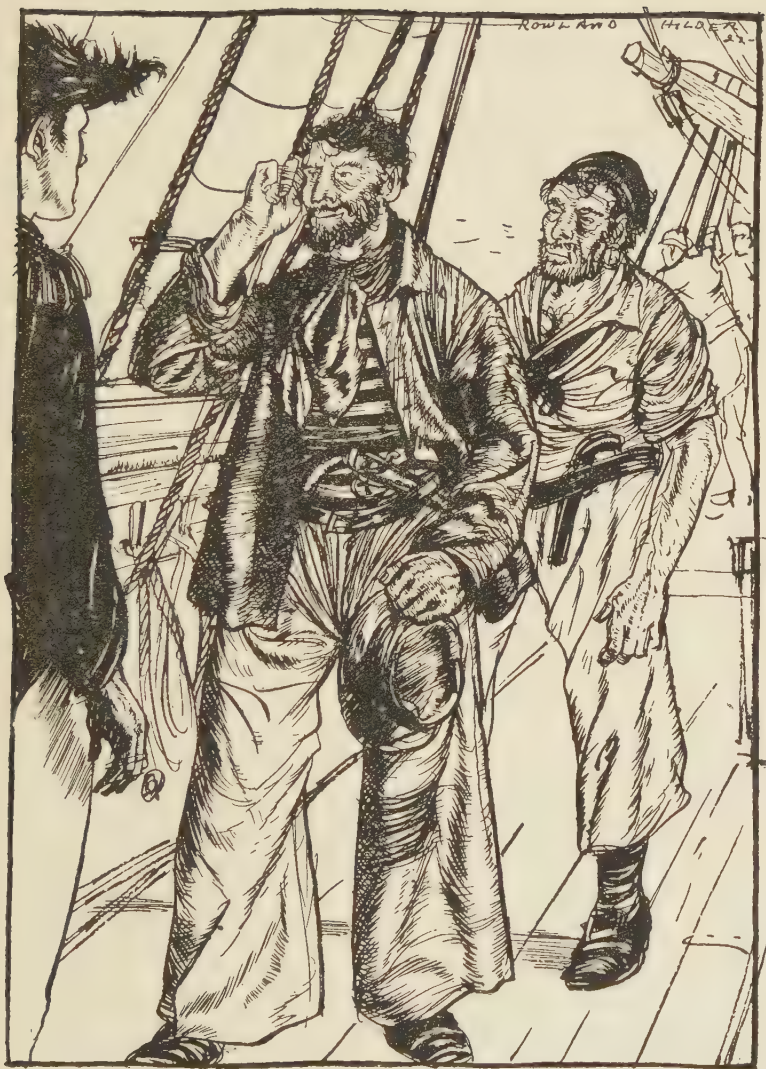
'Despatches from His Majesty, the Emperor Napoleon,' was the ready reply.

'Very good,' I replied, in turn. 'Kindly follow me below, gentlemen.'

There were two of them who seemed to be the captain of the lugger and his confidant, probably an officer of the rebel element; and these followed me down into my small cabin, where, unlocking the safe, I produced from it the important-looking document which was *not* the one which my friends had called for. And, in another instant, I found that I had made no mistake when I had got rid of the right document; for, on turning to commit the papers to the keeping of these men, I found myself confronted by a couple of pistols which the lugger's captain (so-styled) and his comrade pointed at me, with the stern message:

'Thank you, Captain Cortés. We have now to inform you that you are our prisoner. Be good enough to yield up your sword; and inform your men that the ship is in the possession of His Britannic Majesty; and all will be well.'

I was staggered at this, as you may imagine, for I



THE LEADER INTRODUCED HIMSELF AS THE MAN I AWAITED

had thought myself as secure, on my own vessel, as on the soil of France. Turning upon them, haughtily, I inquired what they meant by it.

‘You are the bearer of a message from the so-called Emperor of the French, to a rebel of the Crown of England. As far as you are concerned, you are safe from any further consequences, as our countries are in open conflict; but the other man will have to answer for it, with his head; as he is conspiring against his lawful sovereign.’

‘Not so fast, gentlemen,’ I replied; ‘the ship you are on is a French one, and will give a good account of herself, I believe.’

‘If you will be good enough to lead the way on deck,’ was the answer, ‘you will find that the British flag is already flying over the tricolour.’

This was little satisfaction, but, willy-nilly, I had to proceed to the decks, where, sure enough, I found the Union Jack, as the Islanders call their flag, ascending to the maintruck. The hatches were fastened down, confining the bulk of my men to the deck below; whilst those of the crew which had been above hatches, were now grouped together, forward, under charge of an officer, and a capable set of seamen, who had them covered with their pistols. For a time it looked as though we were indeed in the possession of the enemy.

Our friends of the lugger, together with their boat, had been taken, at last, by the British authorities, who had suspected her activities in the past; and I and mine had just dropped in in time to reap a part of the benefit of their misdoings in the past. Needless to say, I was now at my wits’ ends.

And there was still that ship coming up, hand over fist, out of the west.

I now had good reason to be thankful that I had taken steps to secure the proper despatches from falling into the hands of the enemy. For, indeed, it seemed reasonable to think that my captors would be quite satisfied that they had got hold of the real papers, if only from the unsuspecting way in which I had surrendered them into their keeping.

That was the only thing on which I had to congratulate myself, in this deplorable affair; and the best I could hope for, now, was that my friend, Emmanuel, would justify himself of my selection of him to be a help to me, in this crisis.



Chapter 23

FOR the time being there was nothing for me to do but to await passively, for any sign from my captors.

The deck had been taken by the first boatload of our enemies; and my men, who had nearly all been below at the time, awaiting any sign of their need to operate the guns, were now fastened down. It would not of course have been impossible for them to break through, had they been quick enough; but they did not seem to have taken the alarm until they saw two more boatloads of the Britons setting forth from the lugger; which these had immediately done, as soon as they saw that their fellows, who had command of our decks, had begun their work.

Then my men below, without waiting for any instructions from me, had begun a cannonade, trying to find these other boats, but, unfortunately, without any effect. Thus these new-comers were able to join the first detachment on our decks; and before the men below had well begun the work of freeing themselves from their embarrassment, that new vessel, that had been overhauling us from the west, was abreast of us, and our capture was completed.

I now found that the master of the lugger (the real man, I mean) had been brought along, in one of the boats, for safety, and I suppose, as the lugger had been almost denuded of the British prize-crew that had been in possession of her by their need to pour in as many men as could possibly be despatched for the purpose of overcoming us. He was put under the same guard that had the care of my person, looking disconsolate enough, as he stood with me, amidships; and trying to catch my eye, as though he wished to have a word with me.

This was not, of course, permitted, but I had little spirit to inquire into anything, just at that moment; as, for the space of a few minutes, it was touch and go, whether or not the new vessel should come up in time to prevent my fellows below from breaking out to turn the tables upon their captors. Their corvette did arrive in time, however; and when their men poured in on our decks, our affairs were speedily settled.

Well, with such a large party as our captors were now able to put on our vessel, we had no further chance of freeing ourselves; and, willy-nilly, we had to surrender. The men were then brought up on deck

in small parties, and placed under guard, in the hold; the master of the lugger, himself, being put in irons for his greater security; and also was confined elsewhere. As for myself, I was free, for the time being, being held of small account, I fear, because of my being jockeyed out of my ship in such a simple manner.

Now there was just one other person besides myself who, apparently from the same want of consideration, was left free to do pretty much as he liked; and that was my friend, Emmanuel.

He, poor fellow, had shown his peculiarity as soon as he was brought up with the rest of the men from below; and the wise sea-dogs who now had us in their clutches, had quickly come to the conclusion that he was a person who did not matter at all.

For one thing, as soon as he reached the deck, he was taken with a sudden attack of sickness, and rushed to the side to clear his stomach overboard.

This seemed to strike the Britons as a very funny thing; and they laughed uproariously. Then when he had somewhat recovered this attack, he took what was, for him, a most surprising turn; – he commenced to speak, expostulating with the sailors, I suppose, though his talk was such an extraordinary species of gibberish, mixed with a very few recognizable French words, that I have never heard the like. He spoke, and behaved indeed, like an excited monkey; and I could give no explanation of his speech to the officer, who had the curiosity to ask me what the man meant; and could only say, what seemed obvious to all, that he was supposed to be not quite right in his head. The result

of this was that the man was not incarcerated with the others, being left to roam about, pretty much where he pleased; this arrangement being followed I believe because he might be useful in a vessel to which the new-comers were strangers.

What struck me, however, with some mortification, was to see that the ignorant British seamen seized upon his exhibition as representing, in an ideal manner, the average French citizen.

I heard them express themselves to that effect. They actually remarked to one another that 'This is the real Froggie, and no mistake,' thus showing their own peculiar and incomprehensible mentality, in picking out this unfortunate specimen, which, I suppose, coincided so well with their own preconceived notions as to what a Frenchman really was like, under normal circumstances; and passing over the rest of us, as undeveloped specimens.

But, though I had some reason to look for the unexpected, I could, for the moment, see nothing in all this that was likely to be of use to me in the forlorn circumstances in which I was placed.

Naturally, I was in the lowest dejection of spirits. I was a prisoner of war; and I had been deprived of my first command in the simplest way possible; and that, I believed, no explanation to my superiors would ever justify. My career was finished. The only thing that I felt I might congratulate myself upon was the idea that my despatches were safe; but the present conduct of Emmanuel put even that in doubt.

I therefore took as little interest in the proceedings as might be expected; looking on in apathy, and accept-

ing the English commander's invitation to dine with him, in my own cabin, with dull acquiescence.

Feeling no desire for further company, however, I remained below after my rival returned to his duties; passing the remainder of the day alone, a prey to the most miserable reflections upon my mutilated career. Towards night, however, I felt that there was no relief to be got, even from that, so I went on deck again to see what was being done; and what time had yet to pass ere I should be relieved of the company of the men who had captured my vessel so easily, and who, I thought, must despise me utterly as a weakling.

Leaning against the mizzen shrouds, looking over the waters, I aroused myself to find Emmanuel near me.

He appeared to have been waiting passively for some time as if expecting some order from me. The English officer in command saw him, and I thought he had an amused expression on his face. It seemed to denote that the man, Emmanuel, still considered me as the real commander of this unfortunate vessel; and that the Englishman was a good deal amused by the idea.

I was still to be regarded as of no account, I thought, bitterly, as even the possibility of my plotting some mischief with a member of my late crew meant nothing to the enemy; and, with quite unaccustomed harshness, I told the fellow to be off about his business.

Emmanuel stood quietly there. 'Master,' he said; and I looked at him again.

I then saw the edge of an envelope appear above his shirt, half-concealed by his magnificent black beard.

The Englishman's back was towards us, just at that moment, and no one else seemed to be regarding us. I held out my hand, quickly, and hastily took the missive the man handed to me; – the one I had so lately committed to his charge, as I thought; – and thinking that, after all, it was being passed back to me because the fellow had become frightened by its possession, I thought it behoved me to get it back quickly, and perhaps destroy it as the last hope of keeping it from my captors; and I had it away in my own breast pocket before the Englishman had time to turn to us again. For the moment I hardly knew whether to be more glad than sorry about it.

Then, in a flash, I felt that the paper in my hand was one which had a seal intact on it; and I remembered that I had removed the Imperial seal from my own despatches, in order to decorate the false papers I had prepared; and I saw the plot. Emmanuel had been wiser than I.

He had a verbal message for me, also.

'The man of the lugger say he all right to 'scape when the ship go land. He say this boat taken in less two day. The message all right. Him all right. Look out for *La Muiron*.'

Having made this most coherent speech that I had ever heard from him, Emmanuel went away quietly, leaving me to my thoughts.

La Muiron. It was a name of omen. It was the name of the frigate that had conveyed my master, Napoleon, from Egypt, past the watchful Nelson; and I was thrilled by the sound. I began to look about me now, with a new-born confidence, as though

deliverance were already in sight. I felt that all was not lost yet.

With a little more comfort, then, I got through the remainder of that bleak day; and, about half-way through the next one, we found ourselves in front of a small port, the name of which I have found impossible to retain, as it was some unpronounceable Irish collection of syllables; which I might recognize if I were ever to meet it on paper, though I could not keep it on my tongue.

Here, however, some of the men aboard my vessel, including the master of the lugger, were taken ashore, to be examined in connection with the espionage case; and I could only hope that they were to be rescued by their own adherents, as Emmanuel had told me was expected. Ultimately I had news that such had been the case; and that, so far, my mission had been successful.

As far as my own personal affairs were concerned, I was, of course, still in the dark; and I awaited, with much impatience, for the darkness to lift.

My friends, the British, had seemed quite content in thinking that they had possessed themselves of the veritable message which the Emperor had sent to our Irish allies; for they had never questioned me about the matter; and though they had, no doubt, looked for anything else that might be of any political value, in the ship, they neglected to look in the only hiding-place where there was anything to be found; – namely, my own pockets; and it was their own cleverness that, in the end, was to frustrate them; for they were so supremely satisfied with their exploit in outwitting a

mere Frenchman, that they seemed not to think that the same despised 'Frenchy' might be outwitting them.

It was a good twenty-four hours, then, ere we reached port. After that it was understood that there was a little business to be transacted, locally, in the matter of the Irish prisoners; and then we were all to be taken together in my own vessel to England; where the Irishmen would be tried for their own misdoings; whilst I and my men would undergo the usual inconveniences of being incarcerated in an enemy country.

That was the proposition; but as for the sequel, that was to prove a different matter.

During that same evening it became known aboard that the young British commander and his posse of men had suffered a reverse ashore, at the hands of the rebel element; he having ventured ashore with an altogether inadequate force in his ignorance of the power of the rebels in this part of Ireland.

Then there was considerable consternation aboard.

The corvette which had helped in the taking of our vessel had withdrawn her own force, and taken her departure, during the day, in search of a French vessel (no doubt the same *La Muiron*) which she had received intelligence of as being in Irish waters; for, eager to add to their list of conquests, they had miscalculated the daring of the French vessel's commander; expecting to find him standing off and on, in a timid sort of way, feeling his way step by step until he was in touch with his suspected objective; — the same port to which we had been taken. Instead of this, however, our frigate had made a bold dash, as the

sequel proved; and during that same night she swept suddenly into the little port, and without so much as waiting to see, first, whether or not we were in a position to receive visitors, she hove to, right on our quarter; and pouring a multitude of men on to our decks, leaping directly aboard us, from her bulwarks, she made such a sudden onslaught, that our captors were themselves overpowered before they were well aware that an enemy had entered the bay.

I must say, though, that the surprised British set about their business so stoutly that, had they not been attacked too swiftly for them to get together on the decks, the affair might have ended less to our advantage.

As it was, the triumph was complete. They were overpowered; and British seamen-prisoners being a rare sort of bird, the frigate's commander took care that they should have no chance to get away again; and the score or more of men which they had thought sufficient to convoy us to their own home ports, were soon on their way to France in the same ship that they had been temporarily in possession of.

Chapter 24

FINDING myself thus in possession of my own ship again, I gave my sincere thanks to the able captain of *La Muiron*; telling him of the way in which I had been trapped.

I was very pleased to find that he took a much more favourable view of my misfortune than I ever expected one of my fellow-officers to do. I had expected to find myself, in a very short time, deprived of my command; so I was considerably reassured when Captain Taine told me that he did not think that I need feel any alarm; and, in any case, he would see to it that his report of the affair should be as favourable as could be.

With *La Muiron* as convoy, when that vessel had finished her own business on the Irish coast, I went south, to find Admiral Villeneuve, with whom I had had instructions to communicate, if it were any way possible, once I had exchanged despatches with the messenger of the Irish rebels.

We found the Admiral at Cadiz, where, contrary to orders, – or, at any rate, to the recommendations of the Emperor, the Admiral had put into port; instead of proceeding to Brest, there to release the French line of battleships and others; and, adding them to his own fleet, and being in overwhelming force, they could put the finishing touch to the great scheme that Napoleon had projected, of conveying his army across the Straits to England; leaving the Emperor to work his will upon those stubborn Islanders.

This, to Napoleon's dismay, the Admiral had thought fit not to attempt; having turned back to the

coast of Spain. And, for the second time in French history (for, fifty years before a similar attempt to come to grips with our redoubtable enemies had been projected from Le Havre; also to end in failure), so this one ended; and our master immediately turned his attention to the Austrian and Russian armies, which were amassing to attack my country whilst the Emperor's back was turned.

This we owed, of course, to our great enemy, England; but the effect was a great disappointment for them, for it led to that wonderful victory of Austerlitz; which caused the Islanders to tremble for their own safety; and to redouble their efforts to overcome our growing fleet whilst it appeared practical for them to do so.

And, after that, Trafalgar.

I was present at that unhappy affair. Indeed, it was the only one at which I was able to assist, in any shape or form, for, as everybody knows, the result was to paralyse all our efforts to confront the enemy on his own element; and, as far as I was personally concerned, I was withdrawn into the obscure life of a prisoner-of-war, for a year or two after the event.

I was, however, to 'fall on my feet,' as the Islanders term it; for, getting into the hands of the family of my former friend, John Fogarthy, my imprisonment meant rather more liberty than I should have been able to enjoy, even in my own land, at that period. For I was on parole; and thus at liberty to accompany my jailers to any part of the country, within certain limits; and my friends, who were persuaded that I had been the benefactor of their young cadet, in his time of durance, were not to be outdone in the

bestowal of benefits. So that, though the affair put an end to the career that I had ambitiously planned for myself, my time was not passed unprofitably; for I kept my eyes open, and learned whatever I could that these extraordinary people had to teach me; and when I was exchanged, I took back with me, to my native country, an enlarged experience that was useful to me in many ways.

However, it yet remains for me to relate how it was I got into the position described; and I will proceed to do so.

After reaching Cadiz, where I found our fleet, I gave up the message, which I had received through that extraordinary fellow, Emmanuel, from the commander of the Irish fishing-lugger, and I presume that Admiral Villeneuve caused it to be transmitted to the proper authorities; though I heard nothing more of the matter after I had given it over to the Admiral. But it was in the month of September that I had joined the fleet; and being obliged to await the orders of the Admiral, as I appeared to be forgotten by everybody else, I anchored there, and awaited his decision as to any further employment.

All I received was orders to cruise about in the vicinity of the Grand Fleet, and to pick up any information that was likely to be of service to it. But it was apparent, all through, that our poor Admiral Villeneuve had little enough idea as to what he was to do with the great fleet of ships under his command; and had no thought to spare for a simple schooner, whose arms were of no account in the company of such giants of the sea as he commanded.

Well, at last, the Admiral received another order

from the Emperor; to the effect that he was to enter the Mediterranean; and this time he made his last effort to obey the rather heedless injunctions of an imperious will; for, as he knew, Nelson now barred the way, and there could be but one result of it.

It was a gallant effort on his part, for he knew, as surely as Admiral Brueys at the Nile, that the case was hopeless for him; and his officers knew just as well as he. Yet they went.

The British, this time, had got together a larger fleet than they had ever opposed to us before, being almost equal in numbers to our own; and far superior, in every other way, to our unlucky fleet, the sailors of which had never had any real chance to learn their business; and, brave as lions, as they showed themselves, they had opposed to them a matchless array of ships and men that had never known defeat. And their leader was – Nelson.

It was my fortune to be able to bring the news of the oncoming of the enemy to our fleet; but, after that, I was an all but passive spectator of that great, but fatal sight.

As a result of venturing too near in the course of the employment I found in rescuing many unfortunate men who were thrown overboard by explosions on their respective ships, both of the topmasts of my schooner were struck off, and a few men wounded; but whether the accident was the result of the fire of one of the enemy, or of one of our own vessels, I could not make out. I fancy, however, that the damage we sustained was really meant for another, as we were altogether too small to engage the attention of our giant antagonists.

I suppose it was really my duty to preserve my own vessel, as it was no use my intervening in such an affair; however, once we were thus crippled, I merely applied all my energies to the task of picking up the unfortunates of either side who were in imminent danger of being drowned; and, after the battle, we found ourselves too crippled to make our escape; and getting into the way of one of their large vessels, which then found a little time to attend to us; they sent us a couple of boatloads of sailors aboard; and we were soon at their mercy.

We did not give up without a struggle, however, and not so long as I was able to lead them did my men lose heart. But I was the last of the leaders to become incapacitated; which was the result of my being flung down the companion-way, during a terrible charge of the enemy, with the result of my being, for a time, insensible. Then my men, having no other leader, for both my lieutenants had been wounded earlier in the day, the fellows lost heart; and, giving in, were secured as prisoners on board of their own vessel.

After that the storm which came on after the battle was ended put us in such straits that it was gravely doubtful whether any of us would ever see land again. However the English jacks were able to manage the preservation of the vessel, and in due course we were landed at Portsmouth.

Here I bethought me of the address my friend John Fogarthy had given me, with such prophetic care, many years before; and I wrote to him, trusting that he was still able to receive my letter. For I had heard nothing of him, through all the strenuous years that

separated the time we had been together from the present day, except that I had had one missive from him, at the time of the Peace of Amiens, which had made it possible to communicate for a short interval.

I then found that John, now captain of a frigate, was still at sea. But my letter had been opened, in his absence, and it brought me a visit from his mother, and two of his sisters, who made a great deal of me, treating me in a way which I never expected from an enemy. They set about effecting my release, on parole; and, assisted by the great Earl Fogarthy, who was a power in the Government; and also assisted by the fact that they were in a position to support a prisoner-of-war, they succeeded in getting possession of me, and bore me off to their Lancashire home.

Here a short stay reunited me with my old friend John Fogarthy, and after that it was as though there were no war at all between our respective countries; for I was treated in every way as a friend of the family; and, had my own position been somewhat less precarious than it was, I might have felt encouraged to believe that some day I might really become a member of the family; for the younger of the two sisters of John, who had visited me at Portsmouth, was, in every way, just such a girl whom I was beginning to think might be very well suited to me, when I was at liberty to set about reinstating the family of the Cortés in their ancient seat of splendour.

However, this was not to be thought of, for a great while; and the best I could expect, as yet, was that Emily, – the Lady Emily, I should say – should admit that some day, if papa were satisfied, I might ask her

